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AN

ENQUIRY

CONCERNING THE

DESIGN AND IMPORTANCE

OF

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM[&] DISCIPLINE.

IN WAY OF DIALOGUE

BETWEEN A MINISTER AND HIS NEIGHBOUR.

BY NATHAN WILLIAMS, A. M.Pastor of the Church in TOLLAND.

But Jesus said, suffer little children, and forbid them not to come unto me : For of such is the kingdom of Heaven.

Matthew, xix. 14.

Such as are born of christian parents, and baptized in infancy—are members of the church, though destitute of scriptural grace, until they justly deprive themselves of that fellowship.

Cotton on the Holiness of Church Members.

SECOND EDITION.

PRINTED AT BOSTON,
BY ISAIAH THOMAS AND EBENEZER T. ANDREWS.

Faust's Statue, No. 45, Newbury Street.

M,DCC,XCII.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

ECCLESIASTICAL DISCIPLINE is acknowledged by all to be one of the means instituted by Christ for the preservation of his religion in the world. To the neglect of this is much to be ascribed the decline of our churches and the decay of religion in them. Any prudent attempt for the restoration of it to its primitive vigor and energy, must merit our warmest approbation. To trace an evil to its cause, is the way to discover the remedy. The evil complained of is doubtless, in part, owing to our too great inattention to the young, who, though descended from christian parents, have of late years, been generally considered as *without the church*, and consequently not subjects of her discipline, till they explicitly put themselves under her watch. While they grow up thus unnoticed and neglected by the church, there is danger, that irreligion will more and more diffuse itself with every rising generation, and discipline of consequence more and more languish, till it loses all its efficacy, and the churches sink into *Loathsome* formality and indifference. Our attempts then for the revival of decaying piety must begin in a care to train up the youth in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This is primarily, but not solely incumbent on heads of families; churches ought to cooperate with them and strengthen their hands.

The author of the following Essay has endeavoured to shew, that the children of christians are *within the church*, and in virtue of their membership are subjects not only of baptism, but also of discipline, as soon as their age admits; and consequently that the general neglect of the church to exercise discipline towards them, is utterly inexcusable. How far he has succeeded in this attempt, every reader will judge for himself. But we are free to declare, that on a careful perusal of his essay, the matter appears to us to be treated, not only with candor and seriousness, but also in a plain and convincing manner; and we flatter ourselves, that, by the divine blessing, his pious labour may contribute to the restoration of neglected discipline, the revival of decaying piety, and the edification of the churches. We therefore, with great sincerity and cheerfulness, recommend the following work to the perusal both of our brethren in the ministry, and our fellow christians in general, and wish it may be read with the same good temper, and the same pious and practical view, with which we believe it to have been written.

REV. ELIPHALET WILLIAMS, D. D.

REV. JOHN WILLARD.

REV. ELIZUR GOODRICH, D. D.

REV. JOSEPH LATHROP, D. D.

Extract of a letter from the Rev. President Willard, to the Publishers of this Edition.

Cambridge, August 28, 1792.

Gentlemen,

IHAVE read with much satisfaction, a treatise by the Rev. Nathan Williams, entitled "An Enquiry concerning the Design and Importance of Christian Baptism and Discipline." The plan of it appears to me rational and scriptural, and the execution judicious; and I cannot but think, if it should be dispersed among us, and attended to by our churches, as the importance of the subject requires, it would happily promote the great interest of the Redeemer's kingdom.

I am, gentlemen, your humble servant,
JOSEPH WILLARD."

UPON a cursory perusal of the following pages, I freely and heartily concur with the worthy and ingenious Author, as to the substance and scope of his discourse, and think it worthy of the serious attention of all our Churches.

JOSEPH REMMENWAY, D. D.



FAMILIAR CONFERENCE, &c.

NEIGHBOUR. **S**IR, I have long desired to converse with you on those sacred ordinances of christian *Baptism* and *Discipline*, concerning which christians are not agreed.

MINISTER. THESE are ordinances of great importance ; and were christians more generally agreed in the truth, concerning them, it would greatly recommend religion, and promote peace and purity in the churches.

Much has been said and written upon these *gospel institutes*, yet perhaps few matters of equal consequence have been less understood. The ordinance of baptism lies very much as a foundation article in the christian scheme ; and christians in general profess to consider it as a matter of importance, tho' they have widely differed both as to the subject and the mode.

N. At present, Sir, I have no difficulty as to either of these points : I could wish however to be better informed as to the import and design of the ordinance ; whether the subjects of it are to be considered as the disciples of Christ, and members of his visible family on earth. Pedobaptists, in general, make no distinction between the standing of a person baptised in infancy, and a visible heathen. All are alike admitted to the social worship of God : And however disorderly *their* conversation may be, no notice is taken of it as an offence against the religion of the gospel.

M. Your remarks are just, and would lead us to enquire, what advantage then hath the baptized child ? and what profit is there in *his* baptism ?

But, this notwithstanding, it is an ordinance of great significance ; and christians ought to have clear and distinct conceptions of it.

In compliance therefore with your desire, we will endeavour in the first place to enquire into the design and import of Christian Baptism. And,

1st. Observe that baptism is a positive institution : And all we know concerning it, is from revelation. It demands, however, our careful observation, equal with any moral precept, because it comes clothed with the *authority* of Christ himself.

It is a sacramental ordinance, and designed to be a token, pledge or seal of a covenant transaction, which has already taken place between God and the subject, whether an adult or an infant. It is therefore, in some sense, distinct from the covenant. Yet, since it is an instituted appendage or subjoinder to the covenant, into which God is pleased to admit some of mankind, thereby separating *them* from the visible family or kingdom of Satan, we may not consider the covenant standing of a person, *in all respects* complete, without this *seal*.

But a careful inquiry into the scripture account of circumcision, will help us to a just view of this ordinance. For these two ordinances have the same general intendment in the different administrations of the covenant of grace ; for the believing gentile is grafted into the *olive tree*, the *same covenant or church*, from which the unbelieving Jew is rejected, and partakes of *all* their church privileges*. Thus arguing by analogy from circumcision, pedobaptists, infer the right of infants to baptism—and perhaps the doctrine of infant baptism, will stand or fall with this.

Now if we attend to the account given us of circumcision, we shall find it to be a token or seal of the covenant which God made with Abraham in particular, and with his seed after him. This is taught in the 17th chapter of Genesis and elsewhere. This chapter “contains articles of agreement, covenanted and concluded upon between the great Jehovah, the Father of mercies, on the one part ; and pious Abraham, the father of the faithful on the other part.” In the first place, God requires him to look well to his conversation, and perform the duties of the covenant in all faithfulness : *Walk before me and be thou perfect*. And, after some particular promises, God was pleased to engage to him

* Rom. 11.

him and his posterity what was comprehensive of *all good*, viz. that he would be *their* God, in a special and appropriate sense, 7th verse, *and I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.*

At this time God was pleased to institute circumcision to be a *seal* of this covenant. Hence it is called *the covenant of circumcision**, i. e. the covenant of which circumcision was a sign or seal. And in the 11th verse, God expressly calls it a *token* of the covenant.

From this we learn, that when God had taken Abraham and his posterity into his covenant, hereby separating them from those families which he was pleased to leave in a state of heathenism, and who were therefore said to be *aliens from the commonwealth of Israel; strangers from the covenant of promise, and without God in the world* : i. e. without any due regard to him or any special-interest in him†; this mark in their flesh was instituted as a sacramental token of their covenant relation to him. It signified that they were separated from the rest of the world, and thus sanctified or set apart for God, as his *chosen*, his *peculiar* people. Thus it answers the general purposes of a *seal* to an instrument. It binds the parties of a covenant to perform the conditions of it, and then insures to them the privileges and benefits of it.

This covenant, thus sealed, was of the nature of an oath, by which God and his people were closely connected and sacredly bound to each other. Agreeably to this, God declares to his people, *I swear unto thee, and entered into covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine‡*. Thus circumcision was, to Abraham and to his posterity, a visible token of their being in covenant with God. It found them in that state, and sacramentally confirmed their covenant standing : Otherwise it would be as a seal to a blank ; an unmeaning thing, a mere nullity. And to apply it to an heathen ; *one* who is not in God's covenant, and is not *his* in a *special* and *appropriate* sense, would be a profanation of a divine ordinance.

Further,

* Acts xvii. 8.

† Ephesians ii. 12.

‡ Ezek. xvi. 3.

Further, that a person might be a member of the covenant, previous to his receiving this seal of circumcision, is intimated in the 14th verse of this 17th of Genesis; *And the uncircumcised man child, whose flesh of his foreskin, is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.* By this we learn, that God was pleased to consider the children of his people, as included within his covenant, by virtue of his own sovereign constitution, and previous to their being circumcised. And although infants were not blame worthy for being destitute of this seal, yet, so long as this was the case, they might not be admitted to commune with the people of God, in special ordinances; the passover particularly *. *This was to be cut off*, or excluded from the communion of God's people: And should any such person, when arrived to adult age, refuse to take upon himself the seal of the covenant, he ought to be *cut off* from his people, in a formal manner, i. e. be excommunicated. A contemptuous neglect of the seal, might well be considered as a censurable breach of the covenant; but yet, no person could be considered, as having a *complete* standing in the covenant, previous to the seal's being affixed, since it was an instituted appendage or token of the covenant.

Pedobaptists generally agree in opinion, that christian baptism succeeds circumcision as an ordinance of the same signification. That it implies a covenant standing; and that God is pleased to include the subject of it within the number of his visible people, graciously engaging *not* to consider him as a stranger, a foreigner, an alien from the commonwealth of Israel; but as a subject of his kingdom, a child of his family, or a disciple of his school; and in token of this, is pleased to ordain that this mark of discrimination should be put upon him. Thus, we mark the sheep and lambs of our flocks, *because they are our's*, not to *make them our's*†.

N.

* Exod. xii. 48.

† I would here recommend it to serious enquiry whether we have not been ready to conceive of that covenant, into which God has been pleased to take some of his creatures, in such a manner as has been disrespectful to the Deity.

We are not to bring the infinite Jehovah down to a level with ourselves, by considering him as setting his covenant before us, and proposing that we should take the matter into consideration; and if, on the whole, we find ourselves inclined

N. But, Sir, if we suppose baptism to be a seal of the covenant, and that it infers *complete standing* in the covenant, must we conclude that the subject is a *complete member* of the church ?

M. If baptism succeeds circumcision as an ordinance of the *same import*, answering the *same* sacramental purposes, as the advocates for infant baptism assert, then we may infer the

clined to consent to the proposals, we should then become a party, and by our own voluntary consent, bring ourselves under obligation to walk in the statutes and ordinances of it : But if *not*, the treaty would be at an end, and we be left at full liberty to take our own course. This is the case ordinarily with contracts and covenants that take place between fellow creatures : But to apply it in the present case, would be a reflection upon Deity.

When God is pleased to treat with his creatures, in a covenant way, it is, in such a manner as to assert his own sovereignty and infinite superiority. *I will be your God and ye shall be my people*, is the style of his proposals. This seems to be held forth in most of those covenant transactions that have taken place between God and his creatures ; particularly with our first parents, with Noah, with Abraham and his descendants from time to time. We seldom hear of any reply. God's proposals and commands were received with silent submission ; by which they acknowledged his unquestionable right to make all the proposals, and their duty unreservedly to *comply*.

Joshua, indeed, proposes to the people deliberately to *choose* whom they would serve ; not as if they were then about to commence a covenant relation with God ; it was rather a *renewal* of covenant ; for, long before this they were owned as God's visible people, and had the token of the covenant in their flesh ; and had they resolved that they would not serve the Lord, they would have been considered as covenant breakers. Yet it must be allowed, that those observations and instances cannot apply in every case. A bare hearing the report of the gospel, will not bring a person within the bonds of the covenant.—The heathen, who refuse to hearken to the calls of the gospel, must answer for their contempt of God's grace ; but are not chargeable with a perfidious breach of covenant engagements. However, an explicit personal consent to the covenant of grace, in the external dispensation of it, is not, in all cases, necessary in order to bring persons within the bonds of it : For God has always admitted children into his covenant, with their parents, and allowed them a personal standing in his family or church : — And this is further exemplified in the instance of the ancient Israelites who were constituted the people of God, in an appropriate sense, by the sovereign constitution of Heaven ; and when God was pleased to renew his covenant with them, with circumstances of formality, he expressly declares that he included those in his covenant, who, by reason of infancy (*little ones*) and because they were not then present, could not give their personal consent to it. And this was the case under the gospel dispensation, since our Saviour declares that, *little ones* or *infants*, as the original word properly signifies, belong to the kingdom of Heaven—and St. Paul, that the children of a believing parent are *boly*.

This leads me to observe, that there are many amongst christians, who think themselves at liberty, to own or reject the covenant ; and that if they do not *promise* to walk in God's statutes and ordinances, they are at liberty to indulge their vicious inclinations, as if they could not be bound for God, without their explicit consent ; or, at least, that such a consent, would greatly aggravate their sins ; and therefore to escape this aggravated guilt, are careful to make no promise. It may be expected that this caution, will in the issue, be of no advantage

the church membership of baptized persons, from what appears to have been the standing of circumcised persons.

All agree that under the Jewish constitution, every *such* person was a *complete member* of that religious community. This ordinance was designed to be a mark of discrimination between the visible people of God, and those who are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel : And all who had this token of the covenant in their flesh, whether adults or infants, were considered as members of that family, and entitled'

advantage to them. God refers expressly to such characters, in Deut. 29th, where he declares, *I make this covenant with him that is not here with us this day*, (they were in the covenant therefore without their consent) and the reason why God was thus explicit, follows : *lest there should be among you, man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of the nations : lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood ; and it come to pass, When he heareth the words of this curse* (for breaking the covenant) *that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk after the imagination of my heart, to add drunkenness to thirst ; i. e. because I am not under the bonds of the covenant, having never personally consented to it. For such impiety and contempt of the covenant, a dreadful threatening is added : The Lord shall not spare him—but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man ; and all the curses that are written in this book, shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.*

It would be well if those who have had the advantages of religious instruction, were descended from christian parents, and have had the seal of baptism put upon them, and yet are very cautious of owning the covenant, lest they should lay themselves under special obligations to keep God's commandments ; and take encouragement from this to lead vicious lives, would seriously consider this passage, which seems directly to point them out, as persons eminently devoted to the curse of God.

This objection or caution comes in too late for those whom God has already taken into his covenant and sealed for himself. They are already in that predicament, which they wish to guard against. Their owning or renewing of covenant does not *bring* them into covenant, it is rather an acknowledgment that they were in it before—nor does it infer any *new* or *additional obligations*, though it is a *new engagement*.

It may be worthy of enquiry, whether *obligation* to duty, does depend at all upon our covenant engagements. Our *obligations* to God, arise from what he is, in *himself* and *to us*. The servant that knows his master's will, is bound to comply with it. But his *promising* to comply, gives his lord no greater right to his service ; and perhaps in strictness, infers no additional obligation upon him ; because our *engaging to be for God*, is only an acknowledgment of our *obligations* to be for him : And these obligations are necessary, and independent of any promise on our part ; unless this promise respect things which are in themselves indifferent.

This was the case with several vows which the ancient Israelites were at liberty to *make* or *not*, as they chose. In those cases it *were better not to vow*, than vow and not perform ; for all their obligation depended upon their voluntary engagements.

Perhaps we do not always properly distinguish between *obligation* and *engagement*. A person may be under the strongest obligation to perform *that*, which he has never *engaged* to perform.

entitled to all the privileges of God's people—and accordingly even young children were admitted to the passover, one of the most sacred and solemn ordinances in that constitution. And agreeably to this practice of the Jewish church, ecclesiastical history informs us that it was the practice of the christian church to admit children to the Lord's table, for several of the first centuries. But this is not a matter that falls under our present enquiry ; though it plainly points out the opinion of christians in those early times of the church, and that they did consider their young children as lambs of the flock.

No reason can be given why baptism should not infer church membership, equally with circumcision. Nor do we learn from the sacred volume, that any formality was required of *any* after they were admitted to either of these seals, as a term of communion, in any religious ordinance.

The apostles required that those who were converted from judaism and heathenism to the christian faith, should make profession of it, as a term of their being admitted into the christian church by baptism. The nature of the thing made it proper and needful ; and this was agreeable to our Saviour's command to his first ministers, to *go and teach, or disciple all nations, baptising them, &c.* Here baptism is considered as the seal of initiation into the family of Christ ; and in order that the apostles might know who were qualified for this ordinance, it was needful that the candidate should make profession of his faith, as the eunuch did. I speak now of adult disciples—and the same was needful for the admission of a profelyted Gentile into the Jewish church.

Indeed, to be a member of the covenant, which is implied in baptism, and a member of the church of God, are much the same : If not, then a person may be visibly in God's covenant, and visibly an alien from the Israel of God ; i. e. visibly in satan's kingdom, at one and the same time ; for there is no such thing as half-way membership.

We do indeed sometimes hear such assertions as these, viz. ' there is a proper difference between being members in *full or complete standing*, and being members in *some sort* : Church members may belong to the church *in a sort*, and yet something more be absolutely necessary to admit them

to full standing, and without which they cannot be received. Hence children, from infancy, till they are adult, may, *in a sort, belong to the visible church*, when yet they do *not fully*. When God takes a believer, as such, into covenant, and tells him that he also takes his children into covenant, we cannot think that the parents and children are both taken precisely in the same sense into covenant. Parents are taken as members complete to all ordinances—children are not capable of this. In this manner, it is said, we may consider this covenant relation of children, and be consistent, even if we should not suppose the seed of believers are taken as being truly gracious, or upon the supposition of our having reason to hope they are sanctified : And then, it is added ; Dr. Watts expresses himself thus : In my opinion, so far as infants are any way members of the visible christian church, it is upon a supposition of their being (with their parents) members of the invisible church of God. Of this opinion are many divines, and doubtless it may be defended*.

It seems then, we are not to suppose the seed of believers are taken in, as being truly gracious, and yet, so far as they are, any way members of the visible church, it is upon the supposition of their being (with their parents) members of the invisible church.

But all this studied caution, as to the standing of baptized children, might be spared, if we attended to Mr. Norton's distinction betwixt communion and membership. Members, says he, in respect of their communion, may be said to be complete or incomplete, because communion receives more or less, and may be enjoyed either in whole or in part. But in respect to membership they can't be said to be complete or incomplete, because membership being a relation doth not receive *more or less* : as a little member is as truly a member as the greatest ; the hand of a child is truly a hand, and member of the whole, as the hand of a man. Besides, the notion of the *halfway covenant*, and *halfway members*, has been much exploded and derided of late years ; but should we assert that baptized children are members, only in a sort, or in some sense, and something more absolutely necessary to admit them to full standing, we shall, perhaps, fall into that class of christians, who are said to be for the half-way, &c.

N.

* Mr. Green's enquiry into the Constitution of the Jewish Church.

N. Are not these new and singular opinions, that baptized persons *as such*, are in the covenant, and complete members of the church of Christ ?

M. If what has been said be true, they are as old as the bible ; and indeed our own practice plainly admits it for truth. Thus, when an adult person desires baptism for himself, we expect that he make profession of religion, and own the covenant, in order to his being admitted to that ordinance. In such cases, baptism supposes that a covenant transaction has already taken place, and that this is the ratifying and completing seal. These adults are supposed to be in the covenant by the dedication of themselves to God, and to his people, and to be members of the church. And perhaps it would be difficult to point out any material difference in the import of baptism administered to an adult, or to an infant ; one is in God's covenant through the channel of his parents ; the other by his own act. And by the constitution of heaven the child is federally holy ; is thus sanctified and set apart for God, as truly as the adult. This was evidently the case under the Old Testament, as we have already considered : Nor do we find it any where suggested, that the constitution is altered with respect to children, in the present dispensation ; and until we can find that they are excluded, either in whole or in part, from their covenant privileges, we may not presume to wrest *them* from them.

Alluding to the covenant relation which the ancient Israelites and their offsprings bear to God, he charges them, as in Ezek. xvi. 20, 21. *Thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters whom thou hast borne unto me, and thou hast slain my children*, plainly intimating that their children were born within the covenant, and so were God's children in a special and appropriate sense. Agreeably to this, the apostle Paul asserts that the children of a believing parent are holy ; else were your children *unclean*, but now are they holy*, i. e. they would be heathen, out of the pale of the church and covenant of God, and so *unclean*. They would not be of the holy seed as the Jews are called, Is. vi. 13. but common and unclean, in the same sense as heathens in general were called in the apostle's vision. This way of speaking, is according to the dialect of the Jews, among whom a child begot by pa-

rents

* 1. Cor. vii. 14.

rents yet heathens, was said to be begotten out of holiness ; and a child, begotten of parents made proselytes, is said to be begotten, within the holy inclosure. But should it be said, that since the apostle here declares, that the unbelieving husband or wife is sanctified by the believing correlate—therefore the unbeliever is in the church as truly as the offspring ; for to be *sanctified*, is the same as to be *holy*—

We may observe, that the apostle is here removing a difficulty out of the way of christians converted from Judaism. They had been taught not only that they might not marry with heathens, but, if married, the infidel correlate, together with their offspring, must be put away. This was the case in Ezra's time ; of this the apostle is here resolving ; and determines that the believer is not obliged to put away the unbelieving correlate ; nor is defiled by having conjugal society with an unbeliever. For, says he, *The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, or in or to the wife—and vice versa ; i. e. the believer has a lawful and sanctified enjoyment of an unbelieving yoke-fellow, agreeable to the apostle's observation elsewhere, that all things are pure to him that is pure ; and every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused : For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.* Thus, as one observed, the unbelieving husband or wife is sanctified to the believer, as every creature of God is, which we may have occasion to use. Formerly all who were out of the church, were accounted unclean ; and a Jew would have been defiled by living with a heathen wife ; but now there is no defilement in the temperate use of any of God's creatures ; even those forbidden under the law and pronounced unclean : They are all sanctified to the believer ; so that though a believer might not marry any unbeliever, yet they might live together in that relation, especially if they had been married before the conversion of either. And though this sanctification does not intend any particular relation to the covenant or church of God, any more than *that* of any other creature which is said to be sanctified by the word of God and prayer ; yet the children are entitled to covenant and church privileges, as fully as if both the parents were believers. *Else were your children unclean, but now are they holy.*

This

This was another difficulty which the apostle was here resolving. The question was this, How shall christians consider and treat those children who were descended from parents so unequally yoked? Shall they be put away with their heathen parents, as *unclean*, as they were in Ezra's time? No, says he, they derive a covenant holiness through the channel of the believing parent. The unbeliever is sanctified *by* or *in* the believer; so, as by the christian dispensation, not to prevent the covenant holiness of the child: And this is very different from the sanctification of the parent. 'For, a person's being sanctified in some certain respect, does not give him the denomination of a *holy one*, in the language of scripture; which is a peculiar and appropriate title of those who belong to the church, and is not given to any others of the children of men. And since the children are *holy*, which is not said of the unbelieving parent, the children are to be acknowledged as of the church, but not the parent.' Thus christians are commonly termed, *saints*: Such they are by profession, separated to be a peculiar people to God, and as such distinguished from the world; and therefore, children born of christians, are not to be reckoned as part of the world, but of the church; an holy, not a common and unclean seed*: It is upon this principle, viz. the covenant and church standing of the seed of believers, that our Saviour directs that little children be brought to him, *for of such is the kingdom of God*†. We could not easily find words more expressive of a *real, personal standing* in the visible church of God. It is, as if our Saviour had said, that children, little children, or even infants (for that is the meaning of the word, used by the evangelist Luke) *belong to this kingdom*; they are visible subjects of it; it is a community consisting of *such members*; at least in part: Accordingly our Saviour treated them as *his* children; taking them into his arms, with particular tenderness; putting his hands upon them and blessing them. We may here remark, that to pronounce a blessing, with imposition of hands, had in it something sacred; and denoted that the person, who was the subject of this religious ceremony, stood, in some special relation, to the worshippers and people of God.

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* Hen. in Loc.

† Mark x. 14.

Had this assertion been made, of adults, few would have risked their reputation for candid discernment by denying *this* to be the plain purport of it ; and yet we are told, that children cannot belong to the covenant and church of God, any otherwise than as connected with their parents, and included in *their* covenant : And that circumcision and baptism, were seals of the parent's covenant, or of his faith in dedicating his child to God ; and that the child does not retain his relation to the church, when arrived to adult age, unless he take the covenant upon himself.

But if a person may be in covenant with God, without his own express consent (as is plainly implied in Deut. 29.) and if the children of the Jews were, by God's sovereign constitution, admitted in that church, and circumcision was a token of the covenant into which God had brought them, though without their consent or knowledge ; the same may be said of the children of christian parents, inasmuch as they succeed the Jews in the same covenant and church, (Rom. 11.) and are expressly said to be *holy*, and of the kingdom of Heaven.

The design and import of baptism are set forth to us by the phrase of *being baptized into Christ**, and *all such* are said to *put on Christ*†. This must intend some new and special relation to Christ, as the children of his family and members of his covenant, so as others were not ; and this confirmed by the visible token of baptism. Hereby christians are considered as *putting on Christ*, i. e. putting on his livery, taking up the profession of his religion, and professing subjection to him, as the king and head of his church. 'From this,' one observes 'that baptism is now the solemn rite of our admission into the christian church, as circumcision was into that of the Jews ; we have the same phrase of being *baptized unto Moses*, in the cloud and in the sea‡. i. e. 'brought under obligation to Moses's law and covenant, as we are by baptism under the christian law and covenant.' We are repeatedly said to be *buried with Christ in baptism*, which denotes some special relation to and connection with Christ, of *which* baptism is the token. Indeed, the whole current of the bible holds forth something special in circumcision and baptism, as confirming seals and tokens of the covenant, signifying that the subject stands in some special relation

* Rom. vi. 3.

† Gal. iii. 27.

‡ Cor. x. 2.

relation to *that* covenant, of which they were the *seals*; that he is separated from the visible family and kingdom of Satan, and taken into Christ's household, and has this seal put upon him, in token and confirmation of it. If this be a scriptural account of the design and import of these initiating ordinances, it may keep us in countenance, even tho' we should be somewhat singular.

But though we have, in some way, contracted an habit of considering baptism very much as an unmeaning ordinance, yet it would be easy to show from *other* writings, that these are far from being novel sentiments. The reformed churches in Europe agree in considering *all* baptized persons as members of Christ's visible family, and as having either an immediate or remote right to all the special, external privileges of church members. Writers upon the subject of baptism, very generally insist upon the covenant standing of those whom they consider as proper subjects of baptism, whether infants or adults; and by treating persons baptized in infancy, as we treat heathens, we put an advantage into the hands of antipedobaptists, which may easily be improved, to point out our great inconsistency. And indeed, if baptism does not suppose or infer a special relation to the visible covenant or family of God, we have yet to learn what it does import.

N. Some have asserted, that, 'though baptism, when administered to an adult, infers complete church membership, yet the relation of a baptized infant to the covenant and church of God is *incomplete*; all the design of it is to lay him under bonds to be the Lord's when arrived to adult age; and if he then neglect to take the covenant upon himself, he becomes an heathen, in the view of the church, however serious and regular in his conversation.'

M. Dr. I. Mather observes, that rebaptization is the necessary consequence of this opinion; for it seems, says he, according to this plan, the covenant which the child was in, when an infant, is become a mere nullity, so that now being adult, he must not renew his covenant, but enter into a new and other kind of covenant, which he never was in before. Now it is necessary that when a man doth enter into covenant, he should be initiated by baptism. There was lately a sect in the world, as Mr. Baxter tells us, who, upon this very ground, altho' they did acknowledge baptism of infants as lawful,

lawful, yet did rebaptise themselves when adult*. St. Paul observes, *we are all baptized into one body* † ; i. e. as some understand it, we are *all*, whether infants or adults, as well as Jews or Gentiles, received into the bosom the church, and are *equally* members of his body, which is but *one*. And the same apostle says, *if the root be holy, so are the branches* ‡. This shows, says one, that the seed of believers, as such, are within the pale of the visible church, and within the verge of the covenant, till they do, by their unbelief, throw themselves out. Though real qualifications be not propagated, yet relative privileges are ; though a wise man do not beget a wise man, yet a free man begets a free man ; though grace doth not run in the blood, yet external privileges do (till they are forfeited) even to a thousand generations. Look how they will answer it another day, who cut off the entail, by turning the seed of the faithful out of the church, and so not allowing the blessing of Abraham to come upon the Gentiles. The Jewish branches are reckoned *holy*, because the root was *so* ; neither was there any difference, either in kind or degree, between the covenant holiness of the root and the branch. ¶ Children are *immediately members*, as to the essence of membership (i. e. they themselves in their own persons, are the immediate subjects of this adjunct of church membership) though they come to it by means of their parent's covenanting. For divine institution giveth or granteth a real and personal membership unto them, as well as unto their parents, and maketh the parent a public person, and so *his* act *their's* to that end. Hence the essence of membership, i. e. *covenant interest, or a place and portion within the visible church, is really, properly, personally and immediately* the portion of the child, by divine gift and grant.

Again, Their visible ingrafting into Christ the head, and so into the church his body, is sealed in their baptism ; but in grafting, nothing comes between the graft and the stock ; their union is *immediate* : hence they are *immediately* inserted into the visible church, or *immediate members* thereof. The little children, in Deut. xxix. 11. were personally and immediately a part of the people of God, or
members

* Subjects of baptism, page 65. † 1 Cor. xii. 13. ‡ Rom. xi. 16.

¶ See the opinion of the Synod of 1662, page 20.

members of the church of Israel, as well as their parents. To be in covenant, or to be a covenantee, is the *formalis ratio* of a church member. If one come into the covenant one way, and another in another, but both are in covenant or covenantees (i. e. parties with whom the covenant is made, and whom God takes into covenant) as the children here are, Gen. xvii. 7. 8. then both are, in their own persons, the immediate subjects of the *formalis ratio* of membership, and so *immediate* members.

That their membership still continues in adult age, and ceaseth not with their infancy, they say, appears, 1st, Because in scripture, persons are broken off, only for notorious sin or incorrigible impenitency and unbelief, not for growing up to adult age*. 2d. The Jewish children circumcised did not cease to be members by growing up, but continued in the church, and were, by virtue of their membership, received in infancy, bound unto various duties, and in special unto those solemn personal professions that pertained to adult members, not as then entering into a new membership, but as making a progress in memberly duties†. There is no ordinary way of cessation of membership, but, by death, dismissal, excommunication, or dissolution of the society—neither of which is the case of the persons in question. When adult, they are either members or non members; if non members, then a person admitted a member and sealed by baptism, not cast out nor deserving to be so, may (the church whereof he was a member still remaining) become a non member and out of the church, and of the unclean world, which the scripture acknowledgeth not. Now if the parent stand member of the church, the child is a member also: for now the root is *holy* so are the branches: the parent is in covenant so is the child. But I might bring a whole cloud of witnesses to these points, from our pious fathers, the first ministers that came into this land: And if you desire it, I will recite the opinions of several of these eminent characters, with their reasonings‡.

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N.

* Rom. xi. 20. † Deut. xxvi. 2, 10, 16 and 17.

‡ I trust that serious and inquisitive minds will be well entertained, in reading several lengthy quotations from those eminent divines, since they will shew us how widely the opinion and practice of the present times, differ from those of the fathers of this country, concerning the import of baptism, and the stand-
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N. Sir, as these are matters of great importance, I shall think my time well improved in hearing whatever will tend to throw light upon them : for indeed I have thought that christians in general have attended to them very superficially. We ought not to be governed by an implicit faith, especially in matters of religion. However, a decent respect is due to the opinions and reasonings of great and good characters : I shall, therefore, be glad to hear what can be produced from those venerable men to enlighten the subject.

M. The Rev. Samuel Stone, first teacher of the church in Hartford, expresses himself thus : I conceive that children of church members, have right to church membership, by virtue of their father's covenant ; it being granted that they are in Abraham's covenant ; they have membership by birth, Gal. ii. 15. 2d. God is their God. Gen. xvii. 7. 3d. They are branches. Rom xi. 4th. They are subjects of Christ's visible kingdom. Ezek. xxxvii. 25.

N. Before you proceed in this, be so kind as to let me know, whether there was any thing special in the state of the churches in those early times, which occasioned these venerable men to give their opinions concerning the covenant and church standing of children, descended from christian parents, and their right to baptism.

M. It was the opinion of ministers and private christians in general, that no unregenerate person might *lawfully* approach the Lord's table : And none but communicants were allowed baptism for their children. Hence it came to pass, that the rising generation was growing up in a state of visible heathenism. This was alarming to good men ;
and

ing of baptized persons, *as such*, (if indeed we may in general be said to have any regular and consistent principles respecting this important subject.) But tho' we may and ought to venerate those worthy characters, yet their opinions are to be tried by the unerring standard, and if they will not bear the test, are to be rejected ; I shall give their reasons in their own words, that every one may judge for himself. Some gentlemen have advised that it would serve the cause of religion, to have the sentiments of these venerable men preserved in this way ; which otherwise, may soon be lost in the wreck of time.

A respectable gentleman has favoured me with a number of quotations, from the writings of some of the most eminent divines in the christian church : Some, who lived in the early ages of it, and others, of later standing. It may perhaps not be amiss to insert some of these quotations, merely to let us know what has been the general received opinion of christians upon this important point, in the various ages of the church, though we have not their reasonings at large.

and to remedy the evil, this point was attended to, by the ablest divines for several years, viz. whether the children of parents, who were not communicants at the Lord's table, were proper subjects of baptism? At length a general synod met at Boston, to consider and answer to questions propounded to them by the general court; of which, this was one, viz. Who are the subjects of baptism? And after much prayer, study and converse, they came to a solemn decision upon the question; advising that parents should be admitted to own the covenant, even though they were not admitted to the Lord's table, and their children be baptized. Several ministers of distinction opposed this result, and some wrote against it; however, sooner or later, they fell in, almost to a man.

Mr. Stone goes on to say, in his letter to Mr. Mather, I think, unless there may be some conference this year, in the Bay*, about it (i. e. about owning the covenant) that we may see reason to the contrary, our churches will adventure to practice according to their judgement. i. e. take in all such children as members, &c.

Mr. Mather, of Dorchester, referring to the same matter, expresses himself thus: For my part, my thoughts have been this long time, that our churches, in general, do fall short in their practice, of that which the rule requires in this particular; which, I think, ought to be this, viz. that the children of church members, submitting themselves to the discipline of Christ in his church, by an act of their own, when they are grown up to man's and woman's estate, ought to be watched over, as other members, and to have their infants baptized, &c. These ministers were for introducing the practice of owning the covenant, as preparatory to their having baptism for their children, and to help tender consciences who were doubtful as to their own gracious estate, and afraid to come to the Lord's table, lest they should be found destitute of this *gracious qualification*, and so be more guilty than if they should tarry away. But though these divines were for the practice of owning the covenant for this purpose, yet they speak of children as being in the covenant, previous to baptism, and even members of the church, and thus having right to the seal of baptism.

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* The old province of Massachusetts Bay, was formerly, for the sake of brevity, called, by some, *The Bay*.

* We have the answer of this Mr. Mather, to this question, viz. when those that were baptized in infancy, by the covenant of their parents, being come to age, are not yet found fit to be received to the Lord's table, although they be married and have children, whether are these their children to be baptized or no? The answer is in these words: I propound to consideration this reason for the affirmative, viz. that the children of such parents ought to be baptized. The reason is, the parents, as they were *born* in the covenant, so they still continue therein, being neither cast out, nor deserving to be so: And if so, why should not their children be baptized? for if the parents be in covenant, are not the children so likewise? is not the tenor of the covenant, *I will be a God to thee and to thy seed*? Is not the text plain? Acts ii. 39. The promise is to you and to your children; and if those children be in the covenant, why should they not be admitted to the seal of the covenant, since, they are partakers of that which is one main ground, why other infants are admitted thereto? He adds, if their parents were cast out of the church by censures, or fallen away from the same by wilful apostacy and schism, or deserving to be cast out by reason of scandal, then there were more reason that their infants should be excluded from the seal. But since no such thing can be said of the parents, of whom we speak, a good reason should be given, why their infants are debarred. For, if it be said that the parents are not confirmed members, nor have yet been found fit for the Lord's table, I conceive this need not hinder their infants from baptism,

* It does not appear that the practice of *crowning the covenant* (as it has been termed) ever obtained in the christian church, until it was introduced by the synod of 1662; and perhaps none would contend for it, unless, for the reasons that influenced the synod, viz. to help tender consciences, who were free to subscribe to the covenant, and own their indispensable obligations to be for God, yet feared lest they should add sin unto iniquity, by approaching the table of the Lord, whilst yet it was matter of question with them, whether they were the actual subjects of those renewing and sanctifying influences, which they supposed to be a necessary qualification for a lawful attendance upon that ordinance, and also to prevent the rising generation from growing up in a state of visible heathenism. And though I revere the memory of those ancient worthies, as much as any man, yet I would not be understood to quote their sentiments, with a view to support that practice: Nor to intimate, that I consider *all* of them, as plainly taught in revelation, or free from inconsistencies; what I have in view is, to give their opinion with regard to the design and import of baptism, and the standing of baptized persons *as such*, whether infants or adults, together with their reasonings.

baptism, so long as they (I mean the parents) do neither renounce the covenant, nor doth the church see just cause to cast them out from the same ; for it is not the parents fitness for the Lord's table, that is the ground of baptizing their children, but the parents, and so the children, being in the covenant : This is that which is the *main* ground thereof, and so long as this doth continue not dissolved by any church censure against them, nor by any scandalous sin of theirs, so long the children may be baptized.

I shall next give you the opinion of Mr. Norton upon this question, viz. whether the children of parents in church covenant, are *church members* and ought to be baptized ? Answer—Children of parents in church covenant, are church members, and ought to be baptized. This answer stands upon five propositions, as 1st, Children are capable of confederating; in a publick person ; 2d, Children, by divine constitution, have confederated, and do still confederate in their parents ; 3d, By virtue of this confederation, children are made church members ; 4th, The membership of children confederating in their parents, is a distinct membership from the membership of their parents ; 5th, This distinct membership gives them a proper right unto baptism, so that they are baptized by their own right, and not by the right of their parents. Under the second proposition he observes, ' Either children under the gospel, are confederate in their parents ; or children may not be baptized ; or non members may be baptized : But children are to be baptized, and non members are not to be baptized ; therefore children under the gospel are confederate in their parents. External baptism is an external seal of the external, not of the internal covenant only ; and as circumcision was applied only to such as were in covenant, so should it be with baptism. In support of the third proposition, he observes, 1st, That, that in children which giveth the form of membership, maketh children church members ; but confederation giveth the form of church membership ; therefore, confederation maketh children church members. 2d. That, whereupon God declareth children to be *in covenant* with him, to be *holy*, and to have right unto church privileges, makes children to be church members. But upon confederation, God declareth children to be *in cove-*
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nant with him, to be holy, and to have right unto church privileges, Gen. xvii. 1 Cor. vii. 14. Acts ii. 39. Therefore, confederation makes children to be church members. 3dly. That which distinguisheth between children in church estate, and children not in church estate, makes children church members. But confederation distinguisheth between children in church estate, and children not in church estate, therefore confederation, &c. 4th. Either children are members by confederation, or there may be given some other way of their membership, or all children are non members. But neither can there be given any other way of their membership. Neither is it a true proposition that all children are non members. Therefore, &c.

To this I might add the testimony of Mr. Thomas Shepherd, sometime pastor of the church in Cambridge : This is contained in a letter of his upon the church membership of children, and their right to baptism, printed first in the year 1662, and reprinted in 1769. In this, he asserts and proves, that children are members of the visible church, and that their membership continues when adult, and that the children of believers are to be accounted of the church, until they positively reject the gospel ; and that the membership of children hath no tendency in it to pollute the church *now*, any more than under the Old Testament : And that children are under church discipline. It would be long to insert all his reasons in support of his position ; it is also needless, as his letter is in the hands of many.

With this agrees the opinion of Mr. Nathaniel Rogers, formerly pastor of the church in Ipswich. His words are : " To the question concerning the children of church members, I have nothing to oppose, and I wonder that any should deny them to be members. They are members in *sensu ecclesiastico*. God so calls them. The church is so to account them ; and when they are *adultæ ætatis*, though having done no personal act, yet they are to be judged members still ; until after due calling upon, they shall refuse or neglect to acknowledge or own the covenant of their parents, and profess their belief of, and subjection to the contents thereof ; which if they shall deny, the church may cashier or disown them."

The Rev. Mr. Prudden of Milford, in a letter dated 1651, expresses himself thus : “ Those children who are within the covenant, and so members of it, baptism cannot be denied unto. But the children in question, are within the covenant, and so members of it ; therefore baptism cannot be denied unto them. The children of such parents as are within the covenant of the church, are themselves within the covenant of *that church*, and so members. But the children in question are the children of such parents as are in covenant, and so members of the church ; therefore they are so themselves.” He adds, “ the assumption is evident, because else *such their* parents had not had right to baptism, the seal of the covenant, but they had right unto, and so received it : And the same right they had, the children have, who are included in their covenant, as they were in their father’s. If it be said that their fathers did expressly engage and covenant, but those *not* ; I answer, that the covenant is the same, and of the same extent in the one case as well as in the other, and of the same force to bind. *Explicit* and *implicit* are but adjuncts of the covenant ; and therefore, though they are not come into covenant the same way that their parents did, viz. by explicit personal covenanting, but are taken in by the father’s covenanting for them and themselves, yet it seems to me, that they are not *less*, or less *completely* in covenant. Thus those divines seem to have been of opinion, that a person may be completely a member of the covenant, and of the church to which his parents belong, without explicitly covenanting for himself : And that this covenant and church standing, continues until he openly rejects it.” These were the sentiments of the Rev. Jonathan Mitchel, once of Cambridge, which he expresses in these three propositions, viz. 1st. The whole visible church under the New Testament is to be baptized. 2d. If a man be once in the church (whether admitted at age or in infancy) nothing less than censurable evil can put him out. 3d. If the parent be in the visible church, the infant child is *so* too. And adds, These three things, are, all of them, the doctrines of *all our great divines*, as well as of the scriptures.

I would here observe to you, that Dr. Increase Mather collected some of these sentiments of ancient divines, as
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tending to establish this proposition, viz. That the children of parents professing the religion of the gospel, and owning the covenant, though not admitted to the Lord's table, were proper subjects of baptism. It met with great opposition for a season, and many sharp and bitter reflections were thrown out upon those who were in favour of this expedient, to prevent general visible heathenism in the land, so far as consisted in the want of baptism, which occasioned this Mr. Mitchel to express himself thus, "I should be sorry if there were to be found with us, the *tythes* of irregularities that abound among our antisynodical people in the country, who stick not to despise, reproach and distaste synods and ministers, and *all* upon the account of this matter, whereby I wish the Lord be not provoked unto anger. And how far those few in the ministry that have appeared in opposition, may have been accessory, I had rather they would seriously consider between the Lord and their own souls, than I go about to determine.

It were easy to fill many pages with quotations from the result of the synod of 1662, full in these points; 1st. They assert, that they, who according to scripture, are members of the visible church, are the subjects of baptism. In proof of which, they say that baptism appears to be the seal of first entrance or admission into the visible church, from 1 Cor. xii. 13. Baptized *into one body* : i. e. our entrance into the body or church of Christ is sealed by baptism. And Rom. vi. 3, 5. Gal. iii. 27. where it is shewed that baptism is the sacrament of union or of ingrafting into Christ the head, and consequently into the church his body : And from its answering unto circumcision, which was a seal of admission unto the church : Hence it belongs to all and only those that are entered *into*, that are *within*, or that are members *of* the visible church. They observe that circumcision is often put for the whole Jewish church, or for the members of it ; hence by proportion, baptism (which is our gospel circumcision, Col. ii. 11. 12.) belongs to the whole visible church under the New Testament.

They assert also, that the members of the visible church, according to scripture, are confederate, visible believers, in particular churches, and their infant seed, i. e. children in minority, whose next parents, one or both are in covenant.

In support of each of these assertions, they offer several reasons, all which need not be particularly recited. For the last, they say, 1st, The covenant of Abraham, as to the substance of it, viz, That whereby God declares himself to be the God of the faithful and their seed, Gen. xvii. 7. continues under the gospel, because the believing in-churched gentiles, under the New Testament, do stand upon the same root of covenanting Abraham, from which the Jews were broken off. They are put into the same inheritance, for substance (both as to invisible and visible benefits according to their respective conditions) are of the *same* body and partakers of the same promise with the Jews. At the passing of the Jews into New Testament church estate, the Lord is so far from repealing the covenant interest that was granted unto children, in the former testament, that he doth expressly renew the old grant, and tells them that the promise or covenant *is to them and their children**. If then the seed of the faithful be still in the covenant of Abraham, then they are members of the visible church; because that covenant of Abraham, Gen. xvii. 7. was properly a church covenant, or the covenant which God made with his visible church, i. e. the covenant of grace considered in the external dispensation of it, and in the promises and privileges that belong to that dispensation. After referring to many passages of sacred writ, in both testaments, they infer that the series or whole frame and current of scripture expressions, doth hold forth the continuance of children's membership in the visible church, from the beginning to the end of the world. But these hints may serve as a brief account of the synod's sentiments, and as a specimen of their reasonings: I would recommend it to you to read their result, published by order of the general court, held at Boston, and commended to the consideration of all the churches and people of that jurisdiction.

You will observe that these divines agree in sentiment, that, as the children of the Jews were included with their parents in the covenant of God, so the children of believing parents (even if they are not considered as communicants at the Lord's table) are also children of the covenant, and

* Acts ii. 39.

as such have right to the confirming seal of baptism : And that being in covenant they belong to the visible family of God ; are members of his church, and must be considered and treated as such, until they either openly renounce the covenant, or by scandalous behaviour obstinately persisted in, render themselves deserving of censure and are cut off from the communion of the faithful.

Pedobaptists do, and must (upon their principles) hold, that children are really in the covenant, by God's sovereign constitution, being included with their parents ; for this is the ground and reason of their being admitted to baptism, and thus publicly sealed for God. That the church is essentially the *same* under every dispensation ; that christians are grafted into the same olive, from which the Jews were broken by unbelief : and that baptism has the same place in the covenant of grace, under the present administration, that circumcision had under the former.

The Westminster assembly of divines appear to have the same view of the design and import of baptism, when they say, baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, and so strangers from the covenant of promise, till they profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him : But infants descending from parents, one or both of them, making this profession, *are* in that respect, within the covenant, and to be baptized ; they also add, that hereby the party baptized is solemnly admitted into the visible church.

I will add a very few of the many quotations I have by me, which I before referred to.

1. By baptism, we are joined with the church and are members of Christ's visible body. *Bexa.*

2. Baptism was instituted as a visible sign and sacrament of our initiation into the church, and is a confirmation of our interest in the covenant of grace, *Pereus.*

3. To be baptized in the name of the Father, &c. is by the outward sign of washing, to be made one of God's family, which is his church ; and to be a partaker of the privileges thereof. *Perkins.*

4. Children, by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the visible church. *Scot Directory.*

5. By baptism we are admitted into the family of Christ, and

and the household of faith ; have a sacramental admission into the visible kingdom of Christ, and are members of his visible body.

Naziansen.

6. Baptism is the publick entry and door to Christ's house, or the ordinance whereby persons are solemnly admitted into the church, and made members of Christ's family. There is the same reason for administering the ordinance of baptism to infants under the gospel, that there was, circumcision under the law, seeing baptism is now come in its room, as the sacrament of initiation, or entrance into the church which circumcision then was.

Willison.

7. Baptism is designed to seal, confirm and ratify the covenant, with the promises thereof, unto those with whom it is established : And to give to those a solemn admission into the visible church, who have an antecedent right thereto (by being born within the pale of the church)—This is spoken in reference to infants of believers. Such are capable of these ends of this ordinance.

I. Whiston.

The gentleman that made these extracts, and many more of the like import, has deduced from them, these axioms and corollaries, viz.

1. Circumcision was the ancient rite of initiation or admittance into the Jewish church, and all who received this rite, were considered as covenanters, whether old or young.

2. Baptism under the gospel, is the christian circumcision, whereby the baptized are admitted into, and constituted members of the visible body of Christ the church.

3. That every one to whom the sacred rite of baptism has been regularly administered, is a member complete in the church of Christ, and denominated christian.

4. Where, and whenever a profession of religion was required, the person or persons of whom the requirement was made, were either Jews or infidels, or unbaptized adults.

5. That we no where find in the New Testament, that it was ever required of one that was baptized that he would make a profession of christianity, in order to his enjoyment of any of the privileges of God's house.

6. Infants of visible believers, are born within the pale of the church, and heirs of the promises, therefore have a right to the seal of the covenant *.

N.

* Perhaps some may think it needless and impertinent, to collect such a number of extracts, all tending to point out the design and import of christian baptism ;

N. But, sir, is it not the opinion of some eminent christians, that, *although baptism is a seal of the covenant*, and supposes the recipient to be a member of the covenant, yet it does not introduce him into any *particular* church, but rather into the church universal? Thus they tell us, 'that the catholick church, is, the universality of men, professing the doctrines of the gospel, and obedience to God in Christ, accordingly thereto, and that baptized infants *especially*, belong to this church *only*.'

M. I am sensible that great and good men have differed in sentiment upon this point. Nor would it be difficult to oppose human testimony to itself: And therefore we are to try it by the standard, and to receive it, no otherwise, than as it appears to agree with reason and revelation.

Doct. Owen (a very eminent divine amongst the dissenters in England) was of the opinion you mention; and yet held that baptized persons, *as such*, were proper subjects of discipline. However, he has not told us, whether the universal church, can, and ought to discipline her members, or whether

baptism; especially since we generally agree to consider it, as a visible seal or token of the covenant which God has been pleased to make with some of mankind, thereby separating them from visible heathens.

In reply to which, I would observe, that we have some reason to apprehend that abundance of christians have not duly attended to the design of this ordinance, and probably are not so well established in the truth, as might be wished. We have generally considered baptized children, as being in a state very different from that of *church members*. We treat them as aliens from the commonwealth of the gospel Israel; particularly with regard to christian watchfulness and discipline. 'Tis common to say of them *that they are not in the church*; and if they wish to be admitted to special privileges, they must join to the church: As it, hereby, they emerge from a state of visible heathenism, and commence visible christians. This is to treat the ordinance of baptism as an insignificant matter. And since baptized persons are thus trained up with an habit of considering themselves, as *no church members*, 'tis not to be wondered at, that they are not willing to submit to church discipline. For christians are not to judge those that are *without*. But if baptism is a token of the covenant, and denotes that the subject does belong (not only in *some part*, as sometimes expressed, but *really and fully*) to the visible family of Christ; and *as such*, have either an *immediate* or *remote* right to the special privileges of Christ's house; and may come to the enjoyment of them, *as their right*, when qualified, 'tis important that they should know their standing. And if it is the mind of Christ that such persons should be disciplined, great guilt does lye upon these churches for neglecting them in this matter. And if christians were agreed and properly spirited to revive discipline, upon this plan, 'tis easy to see that it would have the happiest tendency to encourage virtue and discountenance vice.

I have recited the incidental remarks and brief reasonings of several eminent divines upon the subject, the rather because the contracted, and perhaps wrong views of many christians, respecting the import of baptism, might induce them to charge the privileges here advanced, with the imputation of novelty; and because the subject has rarely been very particularly attended to.

whether an individual church, may go amongst what he calls the *universality of men*, &c. and discipline her disorderly members ; nor indeed *where* and *how* they may be found.

It appears from the New Testament in particular, that the people of God did confederate and form particular churches, or religious societies for the purpose of christian fellowship in gospel ordinances ; and for obvious reasons, this was needful, and is practised to this day, as well as heretofore. But are we any where told, that those religious societies, were wont to require of their baptized children, when arrived to adult age, to own the covenant as a term of their being considered as members in *complete standing* ? Does not the silence of scripture in this matter, plainly teach us, that those children, whose parents formed a particular church, by personally covenanting, were considered as connected with their parents, and as going with them into that religious community ? If not, where can they be found ? How can they be disciplined ? Will they not be as lambs and sheep, left to roam at large, without any to inspect them ; to prevent or recover them from their wanderings ? Does it consist with the wisdom and goodness of the great shepherd of the christian fold, to leave those whom he has marked for himself, in such a loose state, as not to be subject to the care and inspection of their brethren ? Is it not more reasonable to suppose, with some of those divines already referred to, and with the synod of 1662, that the children of believing parents were to be found in one and the same religious community, with their parents ? and this they say, appears,

1. Because so were Isaac and Ishmael of Abraham's family church ; and the children of the Jews, and profelytes of Israel's national church ; and there is the same reason for children now to be of the same congregational church with their parents. Christ's care for children and the scope of the covenant as to obligation unto order and government, is as great *now* as *then*.

2. Either they are members of the same church with their parents, or of some other church, or non members. There is no ordinary and orderly standing estate of church members, but in some particular church.

3. The same covenant act, is accounted the act of parent and child : But the parents covenanting, rendered himself a member of this particular church, therefore so it renders the child also.

4. Children are in an orderly, regular church state ; for they are in that state, wherein the order of God's covenant, and his institution therein, hath placed them. Now all will grant it to be most orderly and regular, that every christian be a member in *some* particular church, and in *that* particular church where his regular habitation is--which to children usually is, where their parents are.

They say, were it granted that the apostles and evangelists did some times baptize such as were not members of any particular church, yet their extraordinary office, large power and commission, renders them not imitable therein by ordinary officers. For then they might baptize in private without the presence of a christian assembly, as Philip did the eunuch. But in ordinary dispensation, the members of the visible church, according to scripture, are such as are members of some particular church. Because the visible believer that professedly covenants with God doth therein give up himself to wait on God, in all his ordinances : But all the ordinances of God, are to be enjoyed only in a particular church.

Doct. Owen observes, ' that when God would take the posterity of Abraham into a new *peculiar state*, he did it by a solemn covenant whereby they coalesced, into that church state, which abode unto the time of reformation, which covenant is at large declared, Exod. xxiv. and that this was not properly a covenant of grace, or covenant of works, but a particular church covenant, by which the people engaged to walk in the commandments and ordinances blameless.' If so, might not those warm contentions, respecting qualifications for church fellowship, which have so often disturbed the peace of the church, have been omitted ? But was there any thing in that, *new peculiar church state*, which *essentially* distinguished *that church* from the church of God before that time, and after the time of reformation ?

When a church is formed the confederates engage to walk in the commandments of Christ as becometh christians, expecting to enjoy in that community, the external privileges

privileges of the gospel, of which this is one, viz. That their children shall be considered as members of that religious society, as was the case under the Old Testament dispensation ; for the church *now*, is the ancient church, *still continued*, only with some circumstantial difference, as all pedobaptists assert ; so that as children were *then* born, within the pale of the church, and grew up in it, *so it is now*.

N. But, sir, are we to consider you as objecting to the usual practice of our churches, in *making profession of religion and owning the covenant*, in order to a person's being admitted to some church privileges, particularly to the Lord's table, even though he was baptized in infancy ?

M. I am not objecting to the practice, so far as it is designed to exhibit evidence of a person's being *qualified* for admission to that ordinance. It is a duty of christians to watch over one another, and not suffer the ordinances of the gospel to be polluted with profane hands. They therefore ought to be satisfied whether those who desire admission to the *Lord's table* have the requisite qualifications for it. We are generally agreed that *no one* (even though he bear the mark of discipleship, by baptism) can have an immediate right to that ordinance, in the view of his brethren, who does not appear to understand the doctrines and to practise the duties of christianity. And since a publick profession of religion, in consequence of due examination (as practised in these churches) may serve as a publick evidence of a person's being the subject of these qualifications, the practice, may be admissible, and may answer valuable purposes. But if the descendants of christian parents, have a covenant holiness, agreeably to that of St. Paul, 1 Cor. vii. 14. do the sacred pages teach us, that children have no relation to the covenant and church of God, any otherwise than as included in their parents covenant : And that they retain this relation no longer than they continue in their minority, unless they take this covenant upon themselves, by publickly owning what their parents did for them ?

Do we learn from scripture that baptism, when applied to an adult, is a seal of *his own* covenant ; and when applied to an infant, is a seal of the parents covenant ; or a token of his faith in dedicating his child to God ? Will it not follow

low from the sentiment here supposed, that the signification of this ordinance varies with the age of the recipient ? and that the baptized infant, is an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, until he take upon himself the bonds of the covenant ?

But was a Jewish child admitted to circumcision on the ground of his being included in the parents covenant ? Was this ordinance a seal of the parent's faith, in devoting him to God ? and did he loose all his relation to the covenant and church of God, when he became an adult, unless he expressly owned the covenant, according to the usage of these churches ?

Is nothing personal intended, when the apostle says, *else were your children unclean, but now are they holy* ? and does not the child retain his right to baptism, even if his parents are dead ?

As to the *personal federal* holiness of children, the synod of 1662 observes, that they may be said to be mediate members by means of their parents covenanting, as an instrumental cause thereof ; but that doth nothing vary or diminish the *essence* of their membership. For divine institution, giveth or granteth, a real and personal membership to them, as well as unto their parents ; and maketh the parent a publick person, and so *his act their's* to that end. Hence the essence of membership, i. e. covenant interest or a place and portion in the visible church, is *really, properly, personally* and *immediately* the portion of the child, by divine gift and grant. Jos. xxii. 25. 27. *So shall your children make our children to cease from fearing the Lord. That your children may not say to our children, in time to come, ye have no part in the Lord. Their children have a part in the Lord, as well as themselves.* A part in the church there, or church membership, or membership in Israel, are terms equivalent, as pedobaptists suppose ; and if this gives them a right to the seal of baptism, as a confirmation of their covenant standing ; and if they are to be considered as members of the church, yea, and of the same individual church, to which their parents belong ; *then* this profession of religion is not needful in *such cases* to constitute church membership : Nor does it materially alter their church standing, because it is but a renewal of covenant. We speak indeed of admitting persons

persons into the church by *profession*. They are said to be *church members*, when they have owned the covenant which is commonly used, although they were baptized in infancy, and have had their covenant and church standing publicly acknowledged and ratified by baptism. The natural tendency of this has been to lead us to view baptism as an unmeaning ordinance; and *all adults*, whether baptized in infancy, or brought up in heathenism, equally unconnected with the visible family of Christ, until they make a personal profession of religion. Baptized persons, indeed, would think themselves injured, should we expressly denominate them *heathens*; yet they really place themselves with them, and are fond of being treated like them. 'I am no church member (says one) I have nothing to do with you, nor you with me. What my parents did for me in my infancy, is nothing to me. I knew nothing of the matter, and therefore am not holden by it.' But what is this but to renounce their baptism, and to break that covenant, into which God did admit them, by his own sovereign authority? Is it not, in all just construction, to say 'we do not approve of the constitution God has made? We do not desire to belong to his family, or to have any connection with his children. We are strangers, and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. We choose to be so, and to consider ourselves as belonging to the visible family of Satan.' But had an Israelite, circumcised in infancy, spoken this language, would not God and man have considered it as the language of vile impiety? And ought not such a profane scoffer, who like Esau, despised his birthright, to be rejected, and turned over to that community where he virtually says he belongs? For indeed there are but two visible kingdoms upon earth. The kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of Satan, divide and include all mankind.

A personal and explicit consent to the covenant is not, in all cases, necessary to bring persons under the bonds of it. God may take his rational creatures into his covenant by his own sovereign authority: They are then indispensably bound to perform the duties of it; and may expect the consequences of *performing* or not *performing* the conditions. When God is pleased to make his covenant known

to men, it is their duty sincerely to fall in with it, and to say as the people of Israel did, when they were led to renew covenant, '*all that the Lord hath said, will we do, and will be obedient.*' And those who are not capable of consenting to the covenant, may be holden by it. The whole congregation of Israel, including their little ones, were considered as entering into the covenant of God, and into his oath. Yea, says God, I make this covenant with him, that is not here with us this day.* And 'tis upon the same principle that God is pleased to consider the children of believing parents as *holy*, in a covenant sense.

N. But, sir, does not the New Testament require some special qualifications to constitute church membership? Does not the divine being say, that he would make a *new* covenant, with the house of Israel, and put his law in their inward parts? See Jer. xxxi. which is quoted in the letter to the Hebrews, ch. 8th, as having had its fulfilment, in the peculiar spirituality of the gospel dispensation.

M. This is improved by antipedobaptists as affording a leading principle, in their scheme respecting the subject of baptism. I have no design to meddle with that controversy. The subject has been thoroughly considered by many writers. Those who hold to infant baptism, will not improve this promise and prediction to weaken the covenant-standing of the children of believing parents, inasmuch as their right to baptism depends upon it. Both stand or fall together. If children are to be baptized they have the same relation to the covenant and church of God, as under the Old Testament; and as the church is the *same*, the way of admission into it is much the same as heretofore, and the subjects and qualifications are *the same*: And since children are said to belong to the kingdom of Heaven, and to have a federal holiness, as the children of the Jews had, pedobaptists infer their right to baptism; and by no means suppose the covenant to be *new* in such a sense as to exclude infants from any relation to it; or that baptism does not signify precisely the same that circumcision did, as to the relation of the subject, whether an adult or an infant, to the visible family of God.

This prediction, which evidently respects the eminent effusions of divine grace in the days of the Messiah, and

*Deut. 29.

peculiar spirituality of the gospel dispensation of the covenant of grace, has been supposed to favour this opinion, viz. that regenerating grace is a necessary qualification, for a lawful approach to the Lord's table. And also that baptized persons do enter into a *new church state*, by personal profession and covenanting; as if baptism when applied to infants, constituted a sort of middle state between christianity and heathenism.

Those eminent divines, to whom we have referred, do fully assert the complete church membership of baptized children, and yet supposed that none might lawfully approach the table of the Lord, in a state of unregeneracy. This indeed was not the object they had mainly in view; it was rather to establish this point, viz. that the children of parents who had owned the covenant, though not in full communion, were in covenant, and from hence had a right to baptism, the seal of it; and to introduce the practice of owning the covenant, as we before observed. And 'tis observable, that, *that* sentiment with regard to *qualifications*, led to the practice of owning the covenant, and has also given occasion to the warm opposition it has met with: And its being so generally laid aside, has brought the churches into much the same state they were in, 130 years ago; that in many of them, but very few of the rising generation, have had the seal of the covenant put upon them.

Indeed if we should consult the writings of some of those pious and learned men, we should be at a loss to know what were their sentiments upon the matter of qualifications. We find Doct. Owen, in his book, intitled, the true nature of a gospel church, page 3d, saying, that, 'whereas regeneration is expressly required in the gospel, to give a right and privilege to an entrance into the church or kingdom of Christ, &c.' And after enlarging upon this point for several pages, sums up all, in these corollaries; 'Hence it appears that there are none excluded from an entrance into the church state, but such as are, either, 1st, grossly ignorant; or 2dly, persecutors and reproachers of those that are good, or of the ways of God wherein they walk; or 3dly, idolators; or 4thly, men scandalous in lives, in the commission of sins, or omission of duties, through various habits or inclinations; or 5thly, such as would partake

take of gospel ordinances and privileges, yet openly avow, that they will not submit unto the law and commands in the gospel ; concerning whom, and the like, the scripture rule is peremptory, '*from such turn away.*'

N. ' But are not many things said in the bible respecting qualifications necessary to constitute church membership, which refer to the state of the mind ? Did not the apostle Peter exhort those that were pricked in their heart, to repent, in order that they might be baptized ? Did not Philip require of the eunuch to profess his faith in Christ for this purpose ? Yea, did not our Lord himself *direct to baptize those that believe ?*'

M. These passages, and others of the like import, are often improved against infant baptism. But those who are in favor of that doctrine, will not consider them as applicable to adults, baptized in infancy, unless they suppose *infant baptism* not to infer a standing in the covenant or church of God, and thus make a material difference, between baptism and circumcision in this respect. These passages evidently refer to the state of the Jews or heathens converted to the christian faith, and desiring communion in that church : Of such, it would be expected, that they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him, as a condition of their being admitted to baptism. Thus an idolator, profelyted to the Jewish faith, must profess subjection to the God of Israel, in order to his being admitted to the circumcision, and to the communion of that church, in other ordinances. But from thence we cannot infer that the *same* must be required of an adult, circumcised in infancy, in order to his being considered as a member of the church.

N. May we not argue for the practice of adult persons owning the covenant, though baptized in infancy, from that in Is. xlv. 4. 5. ' They shall spring up, as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. One shall say, I am the Lord's ; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob ; and another shall subscribe with his hand to the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.'

M. The expressions of *springing up amongst the grass*, are supposed by some to express, in a figurative manner, the standing of young persons in the covenant, who grow up with their fellow saints, under the care of their brethren,
and

and with the cultivations of divine grace, until they come forward to act for themselves, and in a covenant way, engage to be the Lord's. Mr. Henry thinks it refers to the plentiful effusions of divine grace, upon the Jews, upon their return out of captivity, when they should renew covenant, as predicted in Jer. l. 5. And that it also looks further still, to the conversion of the gentiles, and the multitudes of them which should be joined to the Lord, and added to the church, upon the effusion of the spirit, after Christ's ascension. These converts were *one* and *another*, *very many* of different ranks and nations, and all welcome to God. Col. iii. 11. When one doth it, *another* shall by his example, be invited to do it, and then another. Thus the zeal of *one*, may *provoke many*. But perhaps, it would be using great freedom with this prophetic description of multiplied additions to the church of God, upon the abundant effusions of the spirit in the times of gospel grace, to infer from it, either that it *had* been the practice of the Jewish church, or *should* be the practice of the christian church, to require of those, who were circumcised or baptized in infancy, to make an explicit profession of religion, when arrived to adult age, as a term of their being considered members of the church.

N. But, sir, if a publick profession of religion is not essential to a complete standing in the church, may we not safely drop it, and, without ceremony, consider all baptized persons, as fully in the church? But, in that case, *'might we not fear that the decline of religion, would be more rapid than ever?'*

M. You will recollect, sir, that I have not objected to the usual practice, but have supposed it might be admitted, for a particular purpose. But is it not to treat the covenant of God, and the sacrament of baptism, as a nullity, to suppose that persons born within the pale of the church, as we sometimes express it, and solemnly devoted to God and baptized *into Christ*, to be, this notwithstanding, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise; and consequently as belonging to the kingdom of Satan? unless there is some middle standing; and is not this as great an evil as to consider a verbal profession of religion not absolutely needful in order to bring *him* into the church, who has already put on Christ by baptism? But if baptism

baptism be a seal of the covenant and does imply or infer a covenant standing, as pedobaptists have generally supposed; and if *this* also infers a real standing in the church or family of God, agreeably to the opinion of our venerable forefathers, where is the danger of considering baptized persons in that state where God has placed them?

The protestant reformed churches have generally paid more respect to the covenant standing of baptized persons, than the churches in New England: And perhaps the decline of religion, has not been more rapid any where, than here. But we are certainly safe, if we leave things as God has left them, and think not to apply our own inventions, in order to keep the ark of God from tottering to the ground. Had it been our invariable practice to consider and treat baptized persons indiscriminately as the lambs and sheep of Christ's flock, agreeably to the practice of the church of God under the former dispensation, and of the christian church, 'till it became very corrupt; and had we exercised that discipline which Christ instituted for the benefit of his family, we might hope there would have been as much religion, and less impiety and vice, than there *now is*, within the limits of his kingdom? But now, alas! a great proportion of those who have been baptized into the name of the sacred *Trinity*, are, almost wholly neglected as to christian watchfulness, and have no such restraint to keep them from open iniquity.

Doctor I. Mather replies to an objection of this import in the following manner: 'It is, says he, a zealous and diligent attendance to discipline, according to the rules of Christ, and not curtailing the covenant, that will keep churches pure. There are two ways practised by man, in order to keep churches pure, the one is *human*, the other *divine*. The human way, is to straiten the grace of the Lord's covenant, that is the way of the anabaptists. The divine way is, faithfully to attend to discipline. Now it will be found in the issue, that the *divine way only*, is that which will attain the end. Experience doth testify, that churches have been pure or impure, according as discipline has flourished or been attended to amongst them. Look abroad in the world, upon the corrupted, collapsed churches, that are, in many places, and we shall see that they have little

tle more than the carcase of discipline amongst them, without the life and power of it, which is the true and great reason of their corruption.'

The synod of 1662, also reply to such an objection, and say: * 'That the owning of the children of those that successively continue in covenant to be a *part of the church*, is so far from being destructive to the purity and prosperity of the church, and religion therein (as some conceive) that this imputation belongs to the contrary tenet. To seek to be more pure than the rule, will ever end in impurity, in the issue. God hath so framed his covenant, and consequently the constitution of his church thereby, as to design a continuance and propagation of his kingdom therein, from one generation to another. Hence the covenant runs *to us and to our seed after us, in their generations*. To keep in the line and under the influence of this covenant of God, is the true way to the churches glory : to cut it off, cuts off the prosperity of Zion, and hinders it from being an external excellency and the joy of many generations.'

It might tend greatly to prevent profaneness and immorality, and to encourage virtue and every thing praise worthy, if whole churches would, from time to time, explicitly renew covenant, as the church of Israel did, by God's own direction ; and as some christian churches have done, to their own spiritual edification. But to require baptized persons to own the covenant, upon the principle of their not being already in the covenant, and standing in no relation to the church of God, has been productive of great mischief to the cause of truth and religion, as it has led baptized persons to consider themselves as not being in the church, and therefore not amenable to their christian brethren, for any of their conduct. This has cut the sinews of christian discipline.

n. Some have observed that there are no promises to persons baptized in infancy, and that therefore they cannot be considered as complete members of the church of Christ.

m. Antipedobaptists may consistently make this objection : For baptism, according to *them*, does not entitle the subject to any promise, only as he is possess of the great qualification of saving faith, according to that of our Saviour,

viour, *he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*, Mark xvi. 16. Hence they suppose infants are not proper subjects of baptism. But, as before hinted, I have no respect to their discriminating sentiments.

Pedobaptists have generally considered baptism, as succeeding circumcision, and as having the same place, and the same intendment in the covenant under the present dispensation, as that had under the former—And as God was pleased to promise Abraham and his seed that he would be a God *to them*, and instituted circumcision as a token of this promise, as well as a token of their covenant engagements, *to do to all that the Lord should command them, and be obedient*; so he is pleased now to engage himself to believers and to their seed; and this covenant promise, lays the same foundation for baptism, as it did, of old, for circumcision.

On this ground the apostle Peter, directed his hearers to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. *For the promise is unto you and to your children** If the promise here refers solely, to the prophecy in Joel, and had its fulfilment in the wonderful effusions of the holy spirit, in his miraculous gifts at that time, how could it be said to be to them and their children, and to future generations, any otherwise than as they would be an evidence of the truth of the christian scheme, just as the accomplishment of other prophecies? for these gifts were not bestowed upon them indiscriminately. And if this general advantage was promised in this prophecy to all whom God should call into his church, might not many other predictions be said to be promises of good to the whole church, in the same sense, and be equally a reason for their being baptized? Would not the apostles exhortation appear much more pertinent, if we should consider it as referring to the covenant which God made with Abraham, including his natural offspring with his spiritual seed amongst the Gentiles in the last days? as the general promises of God's being a God in covenant, with the Jews, was a good reason why they should receive the seal of circumcision; so the same promise continued to them under the christian dispensation, would contain the same reason for their submitting to baptism: And as this is repeatedly referred to under the term, *the Promise*, by way of evidence, would not the apostles have us naturally understand

* Acts ii. 39.

stand it so in this place. Thus in Rom. iv. 13. 14. which is understood to refer to that promise in Gen. xii. 3. in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed, or those whom the Lord our God shall call. *The promise*, has plainly this meaning in Gal. iii. 17. The covenant which was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was 430 years after, cannot disannul, that it should make *the promise* of none effect ; for if, as he goes on, the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise, but God gave it to Abraham by promise ; so, 4th ch. 28. We as Isaac, are children of *the promise*. These refer to the covenant in which these blessings were promised.

If the reason here given why Peter's hearers should repent and be baptized, refer to the covenant as we have considered it, we find him exhorting them, in the next chapter, to repent and be converted that their sins might be blotted out, with a similar reason, *Ye are*, says he, *the children of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, and in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.*

But all agree that the covenant which God made with Abraham, as the head of his numerous offspring, extended to them whilst in infancy ; and can a person be in the covenant of God and not be a subject of some promise ? Did not God promise *that he would be their God* ? And are not the children of believing parents subjects of the same covenant blessings now, partaking of the root and fatness of the olive ?

We find several prophecies in the old Testament respecting the accession of Gentile covenants to the church of God, which refer to persons in their non-age, and implicitly contain *promises*, viz. Is. xl. 11. *He shall feed his flock like a shepherd ; he shall gather the lambs in his arms and carry them in his bosom.* xlix. 21. 22. *Then shalt thou say in thine heart, who hath begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro ? and who hath brought up these ? Behold, I was left alone ; these, where had they been ? Thus saith the Lord God, behold I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles and set up my standard to the people ; and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders :*

This

This is not to be restricted to the return of the Jewish church from captivity, but looks forward to the planting of the christian church by the preaching of the gospel of Christ. The church, after she had lost the Jews, who should be cut off for their infidelity, should have more children than when the Jews belonged to her.

The 60th chapter also speaks of the great increase of the church by the accession of the Gentiles, after the middle wall of partition should be broken down. But what is most to our present purpose is the 4th verse; *Lift up thine eyes round about thee and see; all they gather themselves together, they come to thee, thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side.*

“ There shall come some of both sexes, sons and daughters,
 “ they shall come in the most dutiful manner, as *thy* sons and
 “ *thy* daughters, resolved to be of thy family to submit to
 “ the laws of thy family, and put themselves under the tu-
 “ tion of it. They shall come to be nursed at thy side,
 “ i. e. to have their education with thee from the cradle;
 “ the church’s children must be nursed at her side, not sent
 “ out to be nursed amongst strangers.”

If. lxxv. 23d. *They are the seed of the blessed, of the Lord, and their offspring with them.* From these and other similar texts, we are led to remark, that the children of covenanted parents, being personally in the covenant, are the subjects of certain promises made to them, either explicitly, or by plain implication. To them, with their parents, belong the adoption, and the glory, and the covenant, and the service of God, and the promises: Rom. ix. 4.

Mr. Shepherd, in his treatise of church-membership of children, (in page 5 and 7) observes; The Lord promiseth that they shall, above all others in the world, have the means of doing them good, &c. What privilege hath the Jew (saith the apostle, Rom. iii. 1.) and what advantage by circumcision, if by nature under wrath and sin? (for upon that ground, he makes the question) and answers, *'tis much every way:* but chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God, i. e. the word, promises, covenant; which are the ordinary means of saving grace and eternal good. Others bear the word, but these, in outward covenant, enjoy it by *covenant and promise.* Again, the Lord promiseth, that the
 seed

seed of his people, indefinitely considered, shall have this heart, (viz. a heart that would refuse special grace and mercy) taken away; as well as means used for that end: Deut. xxx. 6. *The Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord.* He will take away the stony heart, not indeed from all in outward covenant particularly, but from these indefinitely; so that there is no promise to do this for any out of the visible church, tho' God of his sovereignty and free mercy sometimes doth so: But the *promise* of this belongs *indefinitely* to those of his church, among whom he usually works this great work, leaving him to his own freeness of secret mercy, to work thus on whom he will and when he will. If *by promise* be intended any absolute, and unconditional promise of eternal life, to the recipient of baptism, it may be as difficult to find any such promise made to the adult as to the infant.

If baptism is to be considered *only* as a seal or token of saving faith, as the antipedobaptists assert, then their inference must be admitted, viz. that none ought to be received to baptism, but those who are capable of having and exercising, and manifesting this grace of faith. But the apostle Peter intimates that baptism will save no man, without an answerably good conscience and conversation*.

Those who comply with the duties of the covenant, which comprise the whole series of Gospel obedience, have the promise of eternal salvation, and confirmed by this visible token of baptism; and circumcision signified the same, and to all that were the subjects of it, whether adults or infants. Whatever promises of spiritual good things were made to the subjects of the covenant under the ancient dispensation, and sealed by circumcision, are for substance, continued under the present dispensation, and in the same sense sealed by baptism.

But as heretofore, so now there are many, who have a complete standing in the visible covenant and church of God, who have not already complied, and probably never will *so* comply with the terms of the covenant, as to be entitled to salvation.

But as these qualifications, at least some of them, are internal and lie out of our sight, they can't influence us, in
judging

judging, who are in the covenant and church of God; nor does their real standing in, or relation to the visible family of God on earth, depend upon their being possessed of these qualifications. Some are *of Israel*, i. e. the visible family and church of God, who yet *are not Israel*, i. e. have not the spirit and temper of the gospel. Rom. ix. 6. And in the 2d. chap. of this Epistle, the apostle teaches us, that, altho' circumcision was a seal of the covenant, and signified that the ancient Israelites were God's peculiar people, yet it would be of no final advantage to them, if they did not keep the law: *For he is not a Jew which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly, &c.* Not that the apostle would speak lightly of circumcision, as it was instituted by God, and a token of his covenant: But he would hold forth to those who were in the covenant, the great importance of their attending to the duties of it. And agreeably to this, he observes; *that circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping the commandments of God**: The same may be said of baptism; and the same promises are implied in both.

N. I have often thought that *entering into the church, and qualifications for the Lord's table*, have sometimes been injudiciously blended together; a person may be a member of the church, in complete standing, and yet not have immediate right to the Lord's table, according to Mr. Norton's remarks before referred to.

M. This may be illustrated by the apostle's similitude of a child under age, differing nothing from a servant, though he be Lord of all†. A child in its infancy is as much a member of the family, as when grown to adult age: And though he be heir to an inheritance, may not come into actual possession, before he is capable of improving it; so the children of Christ's family may not be admitted to privileges bequeathed to them, before they are capable of receiving benefit from them; nor be called to the duties enjoined, before they are able to perform them. Not that the apostle had the state of individual christians in view, *here*, but is rather setting forth the great excellence of the *christian* dispensation, beyond the Jewish.

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N. But if you please sir, we will now proceed to the other point, viz. that of discipline. This has occasioned much speculation amongst christians ; yet, if I am not mistaken, it is but little understood, and less practised, by many, who call themselves christians.

We are generally fond of having our children baptized, but take no care to restrain them from vicious courses, by the exercise of church discipline ; and, perhaps a great proportion of professing christians, do not consider baptized persons, as under the watch of their christian brethren, unless they expressly desire it, by owning the covenant. Ought we to call them *christians* and yet treat them as heathens ?

M. Church discipline is an ordinance of Heaven. We find it in the Old Testament institutions ; and as *all* the members of that church were intitled to the benefits of it, so they were bound to see it put in execution. *Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him*, was a law of universal obligation. And Christ has adopted it into his institutes, and given particular directions, as to the manner in which it is to be executed, as in the 18th of Matt. and elsewhere. And perhaps it will not be easy to show why christians are not as generally bound by this law, as the church of Israel was.

N. I have heard it observed, that, allowing baptism to be a mark of discipleship, yet children are not under the immediate watch of the church ; it is rather the duty of parents, to take care and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ; and the church are to watch over the parents, and see that they do their duty to their children*.

M.

* Parents often *so* neglect their duty, as to the education of their children, as to deserve the reproof of their christian brethren. We are directed to *exhort one another daily* : And it may be our duty to reprove and counsel each other, in matters which will not bear a publick inquiry. For no case may be brought before the church, which will not, obstinately persisted in, deserve the highest censure : And perhaps it will be difficult to find many cases of parental neglect which will bear a public process.

Parents are directed to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And their christian brethren may assist them in the discharge of their duty. And for the church to consider minors, when arrived to years of discretion, as under her immediate watch, is not to interfere with parental government ; or to weaken the hands of parents, as some have thought, but rather to strengthen them.

It does not appear, that the church of Israel left the case of her youth wholly with the parents : But since they were complete members of that religious community,

M. Parents are under special obligations to train up their children in the way they should go; God and nature require this of them; and their christian brethren ought to inspect their conduct in this matter; children are wholly under the care of their parents for a season. But if they are the lambs of Christ's flock, and if of such is the kingdom of Heaven, they have a right to that food which is suited to their spiritual nourishment. And when they are capable of understanding the nature and design of this ordinance; of feeling their christian engagements, and of reaping the advantages of this institution, it is not easy to see why they are not subjects of discipline, and why the church ought not to grant them the enjoyment of the privileges which Christ hath bequeathed to the members of his family, indefinitely; unless it can be made to appear from scripture, that Christ has denied them this enjoyment, until such time as they own the covenant and put themselves under the watch of the church.

N. But may they not be left without this privilege, if they will not desire the enjoyment of it, by owning the covenant?

M. If the laws of Christ require that they should express their *desire in this way*, then for them to live in the apparent careless or wilful neglect of this duty, is a scandalous breach of these laws. But what is more absurd than to suppose a member of Christ's family may be guilty of such a neglect, and yet his brethren have no right to call him to account for it? On that supposition, may not a parent leave his child without reproof and correction, though he greatly need it, 'till he shall ask it as a favour, or claim it as his privilege? In that case, might we not expect that an inconsiderate and froward child would greatly suffer for want of discipline? Then an inconsiderate member of Christ's family would be so far from seeking to enjoy the privileges of this ordinance, that he would wish to get away from it.

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we must suppose that she considered them as intitled to the privilege of her watch and discipline.

But should we admit that the church is to discipline minors, through the medium of the parents, is not she bound to take them under her immediate care, when the law sets them free from parental government? Otherwise, will it not follow that they loose their relation to the visible family of Christ, and are transferred to the Devil's kingdom, the moment they cease to be under their parents control?

But the goodness and grace of Christ, forbid us to suppose that he should leave the enjoyment of this privilege to the choice of such inconsiderate persons: He has rather enjoined it upon his disciples to watch over one another, and to administer this wholesome food, as there may be occasion. The duty of the church in this matter, is very independent of the choice of the offender; they are to attend to him, as he would desire, were he governed by reason.

N. But may not the matter of discipline be left with parents and masters, so long as children remain in their minority?

M. The bible no where determines how long a child does remain in his non age; nor does it consider discipline, with reference to *that*: human prudence must determine this matter. The lambs of the flock ought to be dealt with according to their age, and other circumstances; and should be called to those duties which they are capable of performing, and admitted to those privileges which they are fitted to enjoy; and their brethren of greater age and riper judgment, must determine *when this is the case*; some will appear to be capable of enjoying the benefits of this ordinance, sooner than others.

Proceeding upon this general rule, some are admitted to the Lord's table, very early in life; and such, all agree, are under the watch of the church, even though in their minority.

And besides, how long a child continues a *minor*, is a matter determined by human authority; and under some constitutions they are agents in law, at an earlier period than under others.

But, sir, in my turn, I would ask whether you suppose, that those who object against admitting such persons to the privileges of this ordinance, would consider *them* as subjects of discipline, when, *by law*, they cease to be under the immediate care and control of their parents?

N. Indeed, sir, I suppose, that with many, it is designed merely as a *put off*, or excuse for taking no care at all of baptized persons. For such are generally neglected, not merely, 'till they grow up, but 'till they grow old, yea, 'till they die.

M. I conclude this is the case ; and therefore, as before observed, the ordinance of baptism, is generally treated as a very unmeaning thing, in as much as no material difference is made between the standing of baptized persons, and visible heathens. So that a by stander might, with propriety ask, what advantage hath the baptized persons, above those who are *without* ? or, what profit is there in baptism ?

N. I have heard it asserted, that the design of baptism, is, to engage the parent to take care of his children, or, to serve as a *memento* to him, to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and that it signified *nothing* as to the covenant standing of the recipient.

M. Parents are indeed, strongly bound to educate their children religiously ; the command of God lays them under great obligation thus to do, and their engagements consist in their solemn promise to comply with this command. But is it not trifling to suppose, it should signify nothing further, as to the recipient, than that he had right to expect his parent would do his duty to him ? If baptism signifies nothing more, neither did circumcision, nor is there any propriety in terming it a seal of the covenant, or in administering it to adults, inasmuch as they are not under the care of parents and guardians. One would suspect, that this suggestion was designed to relieve some favourite opinion from embarrassment.

N. But if it be allowed that baptism is a seal of the covenant, in the room of circumcision, and that baptized children are members of the church, may they not loose this membership and cease to be visible christians, provided they neglect to own their baptismal engagements, when arrived to adult age, and also appear to be careless, irreligious and prophane ?

M. Is it not absurd to suppose that a person, under the watch of the church, should yet become an heathen, in the view of his christian brethren, without ever being dealt with as a disorderly person ? when perhaps *his* prophaneness and impiety are in some measure owing to *their* very criminal neglect ? May not *their* neglect be as faulty and scandalous, even as the youth's immorality ? Does it cease to be the duty of a church to watch over baptized persons, merely because they have neglected to do it ? Are not the church,

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in some measure answerable for the wickedness of those dissolute youth, for whom the rod of discipline was instituted and put into their hands, and who might hopefully have been restrained, or reclaimed, had their brethren done their duty to them ?

If one member of the church, may loose his church relation, without ever being dealt with as a disorderly person, why not another ? Why may we not suffer communicants to go on in sin, 'till they have become openly very wicked, and then shut the door of the church upon them, telling them they are fit only for Satan's kingdom, though we have done nothing to reclaim them ?

The laws of Christ bind christians to watch over each other ; and if any one strays from the path of duty, the rest ought to endeavor to reclaim him by christian discipline ; and if irreclaimable, reject him, as our Lord directs. But what more absurd than to suppose that past neglect of duty can free us from obligations to duty for time to come ?

The pious president Wadsworth, observes, that ' children of the covenant do not cease to be in God's covenant, merely by their growing up from an infant to an adult state, as some are apt to imagine. No indeed, *God will be ever mindful of his covenant, he has commanded his covenant forever*, Ps. iii. 5. 9. *I swear unto thee and entered into covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest mine*, Ezek. xvi. 8. Those in God's covenant are *his*, he will not alienate his right to them, and none else have authority to do it. (Bonds of Baptism, page 27, 28.) Again, he says, these children admitted in minority, when grown up, do continue in God's covenant, visible members of his visible church, unless justly excommunicated for their wickedness.' (Treatise of Baptism, page 38.)

n. You have referred to the testimony of several eminent ministers, in confirmation of this point, viz. that all baptized persons are members of the church of Christ ; do they also agree in this, that they are subjects of discipline ?

m. You will recollect that the great thing they had in view, was to establish this point, viz. That the children of confederated parents, were in the covenant, and therefore had right to baptism as a seal of the covenant ; some assert
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that they are born within the pale of the church, in consequence of God's sovereign constitution. And all of them were clearly of opinion, that when baptized, they have a real and full standing in the church of God. Yet some of them incidentally assert the right of such to discipline. Thus Mr. Shepherd in his printed defence, of the nine positions, page 143, does maintain the church-membership of children and their subjection to discipline.

Mr. Mitchell expresses himself thus, 'I think that when all stones are turned, it will come to this, that all the baptized are, and ought to be, under discipline in particular churches.' Page 7th of postscript.

Doct. I. Mather is very particular in asserting and proving, that such persons are subjects of discipline. Thus in his discourse concerning the subject of baptism, page 27, he says :

1st. Baptized persons are under the discipline and government of Christ, for baptism doth engage the receiver of it, unto an observance of all that Christ doth command, and therefore unto a subjection unto the discipline which is by him appointed, Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. When a person is baptized, he is solemnly admitted into Christ's school. Can one be admitted into Christ's school, and yet not subject to the orders and discipline of the school ?

Again, Baptism is the livery which, of right, appertaineth to Christ's household servants. Surely if a man accept of that livery, he doth thereby submit himself to the laws and government of Christ which are exercised in Christ's family on earth.

3dly. That discipline and government which Christ hath appointed in his church, hath been exercised towards children (according to their capacity) in all ages of the world. So it was when the church was domestical, Gen. iv. 16. and xxi. 10. This I take it is questioned by none or very few ; page 29. The reformed church hath ever owned this truth. As for those pure churches, that for a long time flourished in Bohemia, Comenius testifieth concerning them, that even children as well as others were under discipline. Thus also it was in that gathered church which was in London, in the days of Edward the 6th, as their famous pastor John Alasse hath declared. And in one word, in reformed churches generally, and the churches of Plymouth colony, at this day, extend discipline towards

their children (as the matter doth require) and dismiss them also (when by removal put upon it) to other churches. And further, This extending of discipline towards the children of the church, which we plead for, hath been the catholic practice of the church of Christ, in all places and ages, which is a great argument to prove, that it hath the stamp of *jus divinum* upon it.

4thly. God hath owned and blessed the application of church discipline towards the children in question for much, yea for saving good, &c.

5thly. The neglect of discipline towards the children in question, hath been the woful cause of much evil amongst us. There are many sad complaints against the rising generation, and too much cause for them. But how much sadder would it be, if they who make such complaints should be any way chargeable with the guilt of these miscarriages, by withholding from this generation, that which is, by the Lord's appointment, the means of restraint and recovering from this evil. This very neglect hath brought a wound upon these churches, which (except the Lord be very merciful) is become immedicable and incurable. Children have been let alone so long; and many of them such belialists, as that (though once it might have been done with much ease) it is now become difficult and almost an impossibility how to bring them under the yoke of Christ.

But what answer they will give to the Lord at that day, at whose door this evil shall lie, I know not: But sometimes have had inward tremblings to think, I would not for all this world, that the guilt of the miscarriage of so many souls should lie at my door.

I have been thus particular in reciting the doctor's remarks, because they are very applicable to the state of our churches in general, at this day.

N. But, sir, is it not a proper exercise of discipline to hold baptized persons off from owning the covenant, if they have been guilty of gross immorality, until they shall make gospel satisfaction? And have we any thing more to do?

M. Here let me observe, 1st, If these persons are not in covenant, and not answerable to the church for their conduct; it cannot be improved as an objection to their making profession of religion, because this *is to judge those that*
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are without, which the apostle intimates we have no right to do*.

2dly. This has an invidious appearance and may tend to keep a person from making any pretensions to religion. And professors, in some instances have threatened those, with whom they have had some personal difficulty, that they would object to their being admitted into the church, should they desire it. This favours of a spirit very different from the gospel temper.

3dly. If these persons are in covenant and subjects of discipline, they ought to be dealt with as the gospel directs, without unnecessary delay. Sin should not be suffered to rest upon them month after month, and year after year, and then be brought into public view as a matter of scandal, merely as a bar, to a person's owning the covenant. This practice is so far from answering the designs of discipline, that it renders the ordinance contemptible.

N. As we are upon the subject of discipline, I wish to know your thoughts on a few particulars, as, 1st. What are those faults which require discipline?

M. They are errors in doctrine and practice. Yet not *every* such error. A man may be mistaken in lesser matters and yet not endanger his soul, nor reproach religion. His errors must be of an heinous nature, such as strike at the foundation of religion.

Censurable "Heresy signifies some fundamental error in matters of religion, adhered to with obstinacy."

St. Paul reckons heresy amongst the works of the flesh†. And St. Peter says there shall be false teachers among you, who shall privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them‡.

Now Heresy is a proper matter of discipline. The apostle therefore directs Titus to reject an heretic§.

Censurable errors in practice are open and scandalous violations of the Laws of God. But to make breaking points of small matters, or those of a doubtful nature, or such as are merely of human institution, has sadly rent the christian church, and not only occasioned bitter anathemas, but shed seas of human blood.

N. 2dly. In what manner ought christians to proceed in matters of discipline?

M.

M. Our Saviour has given us particular and plain directions in the 18th of Matthew.

But as christians would perform this duty acceptably, they should be influenced by a sincere regard to the authority of Christ and a zealous concern for his glory. The credit of religion, the support of Christ's ordinances, and the best good of our offending brother, should always be near our heart.

As discipline is one of the highest expressions of friendship, christians should always instruct and reprove those who oppose themselves to the truth, either in principle or in practice, in meekness and love ; and should give them reason to believe, that they sincerely aim to promote their best good, rather than gratify any ill-will, or advance any party or selfish interest.

Indeed such matters should never be considered as *party* matters. And no person should complain of his brother, to the church, with a view to obtain any redress of injury done to his person, name or estate. We should have nothing in view, but to promote the interest of truth, of religion, of Christ, of the church, and of our brother.

And as Christian reproof should be *given* with a spirit of meekness, love and tenderness, so it should be *received* with a spirit of meekness, love and thankfulness. David esteemed brotherly reproof a real kindness, and instead of reproaching his reprover, as too many do, to the great scandal of religion, he would make the most grateful return, Ps. 141.

N. But how can discipline be carried into execution, since, even communicants are so apt to consider themselves injured, if they are dealt with in this way ; and very often turn their backs upon the church ; will separate and join other denominations of christians ? And as to those who have never renewed covenant, they dont profess to be church-members ; they ask for no special religious privileges, nor do they desire any : and, as might be expected, will pay no regard to christian reproofs and censures.

M. It is indeed unhappy that there should be so many classes of professing christians ; for, certainly, they cannot all, be upon the plan of the gospel ; and that any should be disposed to weaken the hands of discipline, by receiving to their communion discontented and scandalous persons, from
other

other churches—such persons indeed carry their infamy with them, and cant fail to disgrace the community that receives them.

But since, what you observe, is very much the case, it should make christians very careful to attend strictly to gospel rules of discipline; to consider nothing as censurable but what is a plain and scandalous violation of divine commands; to be and appear to be influenced by a conscientious and tender regard to the honour and authority of Christ; to the purity and edification of the body of Christ, and very particularly, to the good and welfare of the offending brother.

Were christians suitably careful as to these matters, separations, in consequence of discipline, would be very rare, and other churches would be less forward to receive scandalous and disaffected persons to their communion.

But be this as it may, christians are to do their duty, and are then not answerable for consequences; and those who leave their communion, because they will not submit to wholesome and needful discipline, will suffer the greatest inconvenience.

As to those who have never renewed covenant, and neither ask nor desire any special church privilege—this should not influence the measures which their christian brethren ought to take with them. In matters of discipline they are to be dealt with as communicants—if they will not hear the church, they must be considered and treated *as heathens and publicans*.

N. I find that christians are not agreed how to understand this direction of our Saviour's. Some suppose, that it refers only to the communion of christians in special gospel ordinances: Others that it includes also common familiar intercourse and civil courtesy. This difference in opinion does occasion some jarring in practice, and serves much to impede regular discipline.

M. As was before noted, discipline is a great expression of friendship, and is well calculated to promote the best good of offenders: And did we always properly regard this, there could be no ground for those angry passions, which too often influence christians in their dealings with offending brethren. It should give us painful feelings to be

be under the necessity of reproof, censuring and avoiding our christian brethren, as the gospel directs.

But we are repeatedly directed to withdraw from those that walk disorderly, and will not be reclaimed, as particularly in 2 Thes. iii. 6, 14, 15, *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received from us.* The solemnity of the charge is worthy of particular notice, *we command in the name of our Lord, &c.* This may well call up our attention, and make us careful to enquire what the charge is, and see to it that we comply with it. If any man obey not our word by this epistle, *note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed :* Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

Here, I choose to give you the exposition of Mr. Henry's *Continuators*—We must 1st, note that man, who is suspected or charged with not obeying the word of God, or of walking contrary thereto, i. e. we must have sufficient proof of his fault, before we proceed further—2dly, we must admonish him in a friendly manner; we must put him in mind of his sin and of his duty, with that faithful plainness, as will be most like to reclaim him. Then if he will not hear 3dly, withdraw from him and not company with him, i. e. we must avoid familiar converse and society with such, for two reasons : 1st, that we may not learn his evil ways, for he that followeth vain and idle persons, and keepeth company with such, is, in danger of becoming like them—and 2dly, for the shaming and so the reforming them that offend. That when idle and disorderly persons see how their loose practices are disliked by all wise and good people, they may be ashamed of them, and walk more orderly : Yet even those that are under the censures of the church must not be accounted as enemies. The expression is very strong, *note that man and have no company with him,* i. e. use no particular and needless freedom with him, either in civil or religious respects.

And the history of the church soon after the time of the apostles, lets us know, how very exact christians were to practise upon this command, in this extensive sense of it.

This seems to be of the same tenor with the cautions he gave

gave to the Corinthians*. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators—yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world—for then you must needs go out of this world—But now I have written unto you, *not to keep company*. This can be considered as referring to communion at the Lord's table, *only*—this is never expressed by *keeping company*, which seems to signify some daily, familiar intercourse. If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, &c. *with such an one, no not to eat*. This, like the former, is considered as a direction to christians to avoid the familiar conversation of fellow christians, who are scandalously wicked and under just censure for their immoral practices; such disgrace the christian name and are only fit companions for their brethren in iniquity, and to such company should they be left till they mend their ways and doings.

But the apostle limits this caution; he does not forbid christians the like commerce with immoral heathens, the fornicators of this world as he calls them, as with immoral christians; they know no better, they profess no better, the gods they serve, and the worship they render to many of them, countenance such wickedness; and you must needs go out of the world if you will have no conversation with such men.

Now, as the apostle allows them to use greater familiarity with heathens than with scandalous brethren, it must refer to some conversation, that was not of the religious kind—It was not communion or company with them, at the Lord's table; that heathens would desire, and christians be like to admit them to—and yet the apostle allows christians greater familiarity with them, than with immoral brethren. The *companying* therefore which the apostle refers to must be of a *civil* rather than of a religious nature.

It was the practice of the Jews to avoid all intimacy with the Gentile nations—they accounted it unlawful to *eat* with the uncircumcised on ordinary occasions, and much more so, at religious feasts. Accordingly our Saviour directs that christians under censure should be treated as the Jews were wont to treat heathens and publicans. *If he neglect to hear the church*, let him be secluded from special ordinances, and degraded from the dignity of a church-member—

* 1. Cor. v. 9. 10. 11.

member—let him be put under disgrace—let him be unto thee, as an heathen man, and a publican—let the members of the society be warned to withdraw from him, that he may be ashamed of his sin, and they not be infected by it, or be chargeable with it*.

Thus, the directions here given by our Saviour, agree with those of the apostle, referred to, particularly respecting the incestuous person. He must be taken away from amongst them—they must have no needless commerce with him—he must be delivered to Satan—be turned over to his visible kingdom—and be treated as an heathen, with respect to special and sealing ordinances—be treated with greater reserve, and be kept at a greater distance than they were obliged to keep the heathens, and this was to treat them as the Jews were wont to treat the heathen.

The venerable Doct. Owen, has given his opinion of those passages of the apostle, which we have had under consideration. It may not be amiss to recite it: His words are,

1st, To eat, compriseth all ordinary converse in things of this life : *Give us our daily bread.*

2dly. To *note*, is either the act of the church, setting the mark of its censure and disapprobation on him, or the duty of the church to take notice of him, as unto the *ends* of not keeping company with him. Wherefore

3dly. Herein all ordinary converse of choice, not made necessary by previous occasions, is forbidden. The rule, I say, forbids, 1st, all ordinary converse of choice, not that which is occasional. 2dly. Converse about earthly, secular matters, not that which is spiritual. For such an one may and ought still to be admonished whilst he will hear the word of admonition. 3dly. It is such converse as is not made previously necessary, by men's mutual engagement in trade and the like, for that is founded on such rules of equity and right, with such obligations in point of truth, as excommunication cannot dissolve.

4thly. No suspension of duties, antecedently necessary by virtue of natural or moral relations, is allowed or countenanced by this rule. Such are those of husband and wife; parents and children; magistrates and subjects; masters and servants; neighbours, relations in propinquity of blood.

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No duties arising from or belonging unto any of these relations are released or the obligations unto them, weakened by excommunication.

n. But ought a church to proceed with a scandalous person, in a way of discipline, provided he withdraw and leave their communion?

m. A question of this import, the Doct. answers in the affirmative; and for the following reasons: as,

1st. No man is to make an advantage unto himself, or to be freed from any disadvantage, censure or spiritual penalty, by his own sin, such as the voluntary relinquishment of the church, by a person under admonition for scandalous offences.

2dly. It is necessary unto the church, both as unto the discharge of its duty, and the vindication of its honour.

3dly. It is necessary for the good and benefit of him who so deserves to be excommunicated: For,

1st. The end of the institution of the ordinance, is his correction, not his destruction, and may be effectual unto his repentance and recovery.

2dly. It is to be followed with sharp admonition and prayer, which in due time, may reach the most profligate sinner.

3dly. It becomes not the wisdom and order of any society entrusted with authority for its own preservation, as the church is, by Christ himself, to suffer persons obnoxious unto censure, by the fundamental rules of that society, to cast off all respect unto it; to break their order and relation, without animadverting thereon, according to the authority wherewith they were entrusted. To do otherwise is to expose their order unto contempt, and proclaim a diffidence in their own authority, for the spiritual punishment of offenders.

4thly. One end of the appointment of the power and sentence of excommunication, is, to give testimony unto the future and final judgment of Christ, against impenitent sinners, which none of them can run away from, nor escape.

n. I have observed that christians have been ready to think themselves injured, by being called upon to confess their faults, as if this was a reproach and scandal. I wish, sir, to know your thought, upon this plain question, viz. whether confession is of the nature of punishment?

M. It is observable that persons are very loth to confess their faults, as if hereby they should get a wound and blot to their good name, which would not easily be wiped away. But if it is no disgrace to a man to repent of his sin, how can it be a disgrace to him to make open and public profession of this repentance, or sorrow ? This is the design of confession, and therefore 'tis so far from being a reproach, that it is the only way for a person to recover his lost credit.

Sin only, is the reproach of a person, and as it discovers a disobedient and stubborn temper of mind ; but as confession discovers a better disposition, it does him honour. For a person therefore to appear very backward to confess his fault, or very solicitous to extenuate it, tends to fasten the shame of it upon him, and even to increase the scandal, inasmuch as it discovers an unhumbled heart.

Indeed if a person, overtaken by a fault, appears very forward to confess it with its circumstances of aggravation, rather than of extenuation, this may not merely wipe away the stain and reproach of his sin, but even raise his reputation higher than it was before : because it evidences great tenderness of conscience, and regard to the honour and authority of God ; or, a more virtuous temper of mind, which is greatly to a man's honour.

Confession, instead of being a punishment is the way to prevent it ; every step in discipline is to prevent the next, and even the last, is to save the soul from hell ; and when a person exhibits due marks of penitence, his christian brethren, have nothing more to do, but to receive him into the arms of charity.

Hence it is most unsuitable for one christian to threaten another, that he will *church him*, as the cant phrase is, and *bring him to walk the broad-alley* : As if hereby he should shame and punish him, and gratify his own angry, spiteful and revengeful temper. Little do persons think how they reproach themselves by such revengeful threats.

Nothing is more inconsistent with the nature and design of this ordinance, than to view it, as an invidious, reproachful affair, as too many do ; this is greatly to reproach Christ, the king and head of the church.

N. Is it suitable, ever to *urge* an offending brother to confess his fault?

M. Confession ought always to be free and voluntary. If a person appear very reluctant to it, this so far destroys the evidence of ingenuous sorrow, without which, a confession, is a kind of mockery, and makes him appear in a more reproachful light than before.

Nothing therefore, can be more unsuitable than for a person to say, (as sometimes they do) '*I was forced to make a confession—I could have no peace without*—and the like.' This is indeed to trifle with an ordinance of Heaven : And the last error, may be even worst than the first. In strictness, an offender ought never to be urged to confess his fault ; 'tis absurd to suppose there should be any compulsion in the matter.

We may and ought to urge a person to repentance, by using every suitable argument to convince him of his sin and folly ; and if he is once brought to a due sense of his sin, his own humble and penitent feelings, will sufficiently constrain him, to suitable confession.

N. But, sir, if all baptized persons are members of Christ's family and in his church, and when arrived to years of discretion, are subject to the discipline of Christ's house, will it not follow that they have a right to act as voters in the church ? But are lads of a dozen or fifteen years of age, capable of acting in matters of weight and difficulty in the church ?

M. It is difficult for communicants to know how to act, in many cases that come under their consideration : And oftentimes they do misjudge.

Are there not many in our worshipping assemblies who do not approach to the Lord's table, through fears and scruples and tenderness of conscience, who yet are as capable of judging, as those that do ?

Does the bible any where teach us that no one has a right to act in the church, 'till he owns the covenant, though baptized in infancy, and thus acknowledged to be a member of Christ's visible kingdom ?

However, if such persons must be allowed to belong to Christ's family, for the reasons that have been, or might be offered in proof of it, must we allow them no church privileges,

vileges, lest they should claim some, which we think they are not capable of improving ; or lest they should pretend that *that is their* duty which they are not able to perform ?

Those eminent divines we have referred to, did not hesitate to assert the complete church membership of baptized children, without any apprehension of their having a next and immediate right either to the Lord's table, or to vote in church meetings ; agreeably to the apostle's similitude of a child in a state of minority, Gal. iv. before referred to*.

Doctor Mather supposed that churches are to be kept pure, not by curtailing the covenant, but by a zealous and diligent attendance to discipline, according to the rules of Christ. And were christians generally influenced by a proper spirit of discipline and brotherly watchfulness, we should probably have little reason to fear the consequences of admitting some persons to act in the church, who are not communicants.

N. If the observations that have been made upon the subject of discipline, be just, we may infer, that 'tis but little understood, and perhaps less practised by *some* who are called christians. But is there no reason to fear that the case is remediless ?

M. I am sensible that some are ready to say ' the distemper is incurable : 'Tis vain to attempt a reform : The times wont bear it ; and with the slothful man are ready to say, *there is a lion in the way, a lion is in the streets* ; and should we stir abroad we may be devoured.'

But though we may think to keep ourselves in countenance with our fellow men, by this plea, whilst we suffer the vineyard to run waste ; we should do well to consider, whether we shall dare to venture ourselves upon it, at the of our bar Judge.

It is matter of consolation, that we are not answerable for the success of our faithful endeavours. If God is not pleased to succeed them, yet we may hope for his gracious acceptance, through the mediation of Christ.

The very depraved state of these churches calls for the most vigorous exertions. It is at the door of this great and general neglect that a flood of iniquity has broken in, and nearly deluged the land. Had proper care been taken to

watch

* See result of synod of 1662, page 82, 83.

watch over the sheep and lambs of Christ's flock, it would have served as a mighty restraint, to keep them from such wanderings and such obstinacy in the paths of iniquity, as bring the greatest reproach upon the christian name. And was there now a proper zeal to revive this decayed ordinance, it would probably do more towards restraining loose and vicious persons from their sinful excesses, than human laws, executed in the best manner.

But so regardless are christians in general of their duty in this matter, that discipline is grown into disuse. In many places the greatest part of Christ's disciples are *wholly* neglected. Even communicants are let alone in their scandalous sins. This is acknowledged to be the case in some churches that are very strict in the admission of members.

And baptized persons who have not renewed covenant, are treated as heathens in this matter. However scandalous their conduct is, and though they proclaim their sin as Sodom, yet they have no apprehension that they shall be called to account by their christian brethren. And many are so impatient of reproof, and probably through the very faulty neglect of christians in the matter of discipline, that should any one venture to administer reproof to his neighbour, for high handed offences, he may expect it will be returned in bitter reproaches.

Is it not so, that one can scarcely go abroad without having his ears grated with the most profane language from the mouths of those who have been baptized into the name of Christ? How often are we witnesses to the most scandalous conduct in those who would think themselves injured should they be called heathens? and yet will not bear a word of brotherly reproof; and would even scorn the thought of being accountable to christians for the vilest conduct. And can we wonder at it, since scarcely the shadow of discipline is to be found in many of our churches? For this sinful neglect great guilt must lie upon the land.

Oh! how have the churches lost their beauty and their glory! does not the whole appear like a shattered edifice ready to fall about our ears!

As to those churches that have nothing more than the *name*, and wont bear a revival of discipline upon gospel principles, who could lament it should they fall into *ruins*,

to make way for such as would answer the ends of a gospel institution. Are they not nigh unto cursing? and have they not reason to fear that God will wholly cast them off, and most visibly disown them, as he, long since, did the once flourishing churches of Asia?

In many of our churches there are serious christians who mourn in secret for the lax state of discipline, very visible amongst us, and devoutly wish for a revival of this ordinance upon what they believe truly gospel principles, including all baptized persons arrived to years of discretion: But find themselves wholly unequal to the arduous task, since they are not supported by their christian brethren.

Some churches are of opinion that such persons are lambs of Christ's flock, and have a right to the benefits of this very salutary ordinance, by his sovereign and gracious constitution. And though they may have resolved that 'tis their duty to watch over them in a way of christian discipline, yet find themselves exceedingly embarrassed in their attempts to carry it into execution, since they have not the support of sister churches; but are considered as setting up for singularity, and are, perhaps, derided as being a company of sick brained enthusiasts who are running wild, and by overacting will break the reins of government, and bring themselves into contempt, and perhaps destroy their very existence as churches.

Should they attempt to discipline their baptized members, it will at once be said, 'other churches do not harass such persons by vexatious church prosecutions;' as if the discipline of Christ's house was not for edification, but for destruction. And indeed this is the light in which this divine ordinance is too commonly viewed.

'Tis not uncommon to hear persons of distinction in our churches, speak of those as rash and imprudent, who endeavour to revive discipline, not because it is unscriptural, but because it is unpopular, and thus discourage the hearts and weaken the hands of those who mourn for the degeneracy of the times, and believe that a proper attention to those sacred rules of discipline which our divine Lord has given for the regulation of his kingdom, would have the happiest tendency towards effecting a reformation; at least as to open irreligion and immorality.

The greatest discouragements arise from those, who profess to be friends to the cause of Christ, and yet excuse themselves from affording their assistance to help forward a reformation, which they own is much wanted, under the pretence that *'tis not prudent—the times wont bear it*, and the like.

If we admit what we have attempted to prove, viz. That baptism is a seal of the covenant, and signifies that the recipient, whether an adult or an infant, has a real and personal standing in the visible church of God—that the infant denies his relation to the covenant and church of God, by the grant and constitution of the great head of the church, through the channel of his parent, and goes with the parent, into that individual church to which he belongs; and has a right to the privileges of discipline in that religious community; and holds this *relation* and *right* until he is regularly removed from it, as is the case with persons admitted in adult age; it will follow, that the church is bound by the laws of Christ, to watch over him as one of her members; nor can she be excused, although the labor and difficulty of doing her duty be ever so great.

Our divine Lord has not told his disciples, 'you shall watch over one another, provided this can be done with peace and harmony; and your offending brother will take it in good part. But if it is like to make a disturbance in the church, and will prove a troublesome affair, you may even suffer sin upon your brother, and let the members of my family disgrace my name and religion, as much as they please. But see to it that you do not throw all into confusion, by indiscreetly espousing my cause.'

Do we not by neglecting to take care of one another, represent our Lord as saying thus. And does not this as well excuse us from watching over communicants? Yea are they not, almost wholly, neglected in many of our churches? In short, where is the glory we once spake of? Where is the zeal for discipline which distinguished the primitive churches of this land? Where is the virtuous order which was so much their glory? even though we allow it to be tarnished by that intolerant spirit, and indiscreet zeal which appeared in our fathers, with the rest of mankind in that bigotted age of the world?

We dont reason in matters of interest, as we many times do in matters of duty. Instead of laying them aside, we rise to vigorous exertions ; and by extraordinary care and diligence, effect that, which would otherwise be left undone. And shall we do more for our temporal interest, than for the interest of virtue and religion ? Shall we be able to hold up our faces to our divine Lord, when he will require us to give an account of the care we have taken to carry his laws and ordinances into execution ?

Had we the zeal of Phineas, could we stand by and see the laws of Christ trampled under foot, by those whom he has been pleased to own as members of his family, and not execute upon them the law of discipline ? Did we love one another with pure hearts fervently, should we not take care to pluck our sinning brother as a brand out of the burning ?

A gentleman, who has been desirous that this book might be reprinted, lately wrote me ‘ that some who have read it and like it, think it impossible to bring about a reform, and therefore it is not best to meddle with it, and adds, of such men, I fear there are not a few amongst us.’

But shall the church of Christ become a cage of unclean birds ? Shall she hold her peace and not dare testify against her scandalous members, in the way which Christ has directed ? Nay, shall she countenance vice ? Shall she fondle in her bosom those who openly trample Christ under their feet, and not dare appear on his side ? Will he be pleased with those who have not courage enough to stand up against the workers of iniquity, and he, who will leave his interest to sink into disgrace and infamy, rather than rouse from their lethargy ?

It is not many years since the general association of this state (agreeable to the result of the synod in Boston in 1662) advised the churches to watch over the lambs of Christ’s flock, and thus keep them from running astray, or bring them back from their wanderings ; many churches voted a compliance with their advice. Some have endeavoured to carry it into effect ; but have found it an arduous task, because they have been deserted by their brethren.

But would those who do, in theory, admit these principles, unitedly exert themselves ; and, with prudent firmness,

ness, endeavour to strengthen each others hands, we should have no reason to fear for the existence or the peace of our churches. Instead of that, they would probably collect firmness and become more respectable. Vice would not appear with a bold and impudent face, virtue and every thing praise worthy, would be encouraged, and these churches become the glory of our land.

Perhaps the preceding remarks, by many will be considered as unseasonable, and tending to mischief. Such insinuations, however, can make no considerable impression upon a mind fully persuaded, that there is the greatest need of reviving discipline upon gospel principles ; and that it might be effected with the blessing of heaven upon the prudent and determined exertions of those who profess subjection to Christ as their Lord and Master.

And especially, if, in addition to the advice of several religious and very respectable characters, that this enquiry should be made publick, the things herein contained, proceed from a conviction that they are taught us in the sacred pages.

But as lax as matters now are, would ministers generally, with a respectable number of private christians, exert themselves with a prudent zeal and firmness, to strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die, might we not hope that this divine ordinance would collect firmness and grow respectable ? that the rod of discipline would be a terror to evil doers, and a praise to such as do well ? At least that the loose and profane, who are a disgrace to the christian name, would be awed into decency of conduct ?

Might not we hope that the church of Christ would recover her lost reputation ; become *beautiful as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, and terrible as an army with banners* ? That *her light would break forth as the morning, and her health spring forth speedily, and her righteousness go before her, and the glory of the Lord be her re-reward.*

A P P E N D I X.

Containing a number of FORMULAS, for the assistance of young Ministers, and private Christians, in CHURCH PROCESSES.

FORM of a COMPLAINT.

To the Rev. I. L. Pastor of the Church of Christ in H. and to said Church.

COMES S. W. a member of the church, and informs, and gives said pastor and church to understand, that, L. R. who is also a member of this church, did, on the ——— day of ——— at ——— with an ill intention, being minded to hurt, stain and blacken the character of R. H. in the presence and hearing of T. W. and F. E. utter, speak and publish, as followeth ; that is to say, that R. W. is a thief, and has stolen money out of the chest of N. P. which expressions your complainant considers as false, and a censurable breach of the 9th commandment of the moral law ; and just cause of offence to all good men. Your complainant further saith, that he hath taken the regular steps of the gospel, for convincing and reclaiming the said L. R. but he refuseth to hearken : And as in duty bound, he now tells it to the church, that his brother may be proceeded with according to the rules of the gospel.

S. W.

Dated in H. this ——— day of ———.

The complaint may be committed to a brother of the church, to be by him read in the hearing of the supposed offender, with a citation to answer, written upon the complaint ; which may be to the following import.

To L. R. a Member of the Church of Christ in H.

THESE are to require you to appear before this church, at their meeting, on the ——— day of ——— at 2 o'clock P. M. at ——— to answer to the within complaint.

I. L. Pastor,

IT ought to be remembered, that in all church processes, the only parties, are the great head of the church, on the one hand, and the supposed

supposed offender on the other. Whoever, therefore, is considered as being personally injured, or interested, he is, in a measure, disqualified for taking an active part in the process, either as informer or judge.

A Citation for Witnesses.

WHEREAS S. W. has exhibited a complaint against L. R. for being guilty of censurable defamation, and informed that you can testify to the church of matters contained in said complaint, and has desired that you may be cited for that end—This is therefore to require you to appear before this church, at their meeting on, &c. to testify to what you know concerning that case.

I. L. Pastor.

Dated at, &c.

A Judgment upon a Complaint.

At a meeting of the pastor and brethren of the church of Christ, in H. on ——— day of ———.

THIS church taking into their serious consideration, a complaint, exhibited by S. W. against L. R. for being guilty of a scandalous breach of the 9th commandment of the moral law, and having heard the evidence, and pleas thereon, are of opinion, that the charge is supported, and that the said L. R. in case of obstinacy, ought to be proceeded with, in way of censure, according to the rules of the gospel.

Attest.

I. L. Pastor.

A Confession.

I L. R. do humbly acknowledge before God and this congregation, that I have made myself guilty of the heinous sin of ———; whereby I have offended God and this church; scandalized religion and wounded my own soul: And I do hereby declare my hearty sorrow for this my sin; and humbly ask the pardoning mercy of God, and the forgiveness of my christian brethren; together with their prayers for me, that I may be enabled to walk circumspectly and inoffensively for the future.

L. R.

A Citation to appear and receive an Admonition.

To L. R. a member of the church of Christ in H.

WHEREAS you have been convicted of the scandalous sin of ——— and, after due pains taken with you in private, still remain obstinate and impenitent; whereby it becomes necessary, according to the rules of the gospel, that you be publicly admonished, as an instituted mean to bring you to repentance.

These

These are, therefore, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to require you to appear before the pastor and congregation, in the meeting house in H. on the next Lord's day, in the afternoon ; then and there to receive a publick admonition for the sin aforesaid,

I. L. Pastor.

A Form of Admonition.

BROTHER L. R. Be exhorted, to consider that a holy and sovereign God, who calleth all men to repentance, hath commanded us to exhort one another daily ; and those who sin, to rebuke before all, that others may hear and fear ; and if they repent not, to avoid and consider them as heathens and publicans : According to these, and such-like commands of our divine Lord, this church have taken into serious consideration, a complaint exhibited against you, and have judged you guilty of a censurable breach of the 9th commandment of the moral law ; and since you discover no signs of penitence, we now admonish you in the name, and by the authority of Christ, forthwith to hearken to divine rebuke ; lay to heart you sin ; the affront you offer to Christ, and the just occasion of offence you give to your christian brethren, who are bound to watch over you in the way of gospel discipline, and not suffer sin upon you.

We earnestly exhort you, for the sake of your own soul, seriously to consider what it is you can gain by your impenitence, and whether it will compensate for the loss of everlasting life ; and how you expect to stand in judgment before God, as you refuse now to comply with your duty, and turn to him in a way of reformation.

And as a minister of Christ and the pastor of this church, I do now earnestly beseech you, and in the name of Christ, exhort and charge you, as you will answer the contrary at the bar of God ; that you forthwith, unfeignedly repent of your sin, as becometh one, who has been made acquainted with his Lord's will, and is under indispensable obligation to walk inoffensively.

This admonition is given you, not out of any ill will to your person, (as the Lord knoweth) but in love to your soul, and in obedience to Christ Jesus, who hath made it my duty ; desiring that you may be recovered from the error of your ways, and be reconciled to God, and to his church ; that so you may not be cut off from the communion of the church of Christ here, nor be excluded from the church triumphant above.

Signed I. L. Pastor.

An heretick, says the apostle Paul, after the first and second admonition, reject. From hence it is inferred, that the church may cast no one finally out of her communion, let his offence be what it may, with-

out a repeated admonition. Some consider the judgment of the church, declaring a person guilty of a censurable fault, as the first admonition ; since hereby he is suspended from the enjoyment of special ordinances.

A form of Excommunication.

WHEREAS you L. R. have been adjudged guilty of a censurable breach of the ninth commandment of the moral law, and after due admonition, and much patience, dost yet remain obstinate, giving no evidence of repentance ; and it being the will and ordinance of our Lord Jesus Christ, that his church should have no fellowship with wicked and scandalous persons ; but withdraw themselves from every brother who walketh disorderly, and cast such out of the church ; and esteem and treat them as heathens and publicans. I do therefore, in the name and by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the consent of this church, declare thee L. R. excommunicated and cast out of the communion of the church of Christ ; debar thee from their privileges, and deliver thee into the visible kingdom of Satan, for the destruction of thy fleshly and corrupt principles and practices, that thy spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Dated, &c.

I. L. Pastor ;
with the concurrence of
the brethren.

An Absolution.

WHEREAS thou L. R. for thy scandalous sin, and obstinate impenitence, hast been cast out of the communion of the church ; and hast now manifested thy repentance, to the satisfaction of the church—In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and before this congregation, I pronounce *thee* absolved from the sentence of excommunication, formerly denounced against *thee*, and do receive thee into the communion of the church, and the free use of all the ordinances of Christ, that thou mayest be a partaker of his benefits to thy eternal salvation.

I. L. Pastor ;
with the consent of
the brethren.



